THE FARM OF MELCHIZEDEK

"RITA"

HUTCHINSON'S NEW EDITIONS.

Each volume handsomely bound, full gilt, with attractive picture wrapper, 2/- net.

Bonds of Egypt
PATRICK RUSHDEN

Winnie O'Wynn and the Dark Horses
BERTRAM ATKEY

The Story of Oscar
JOHN AYSCOUGH

The Autocrat
PEARL DOLES BELL

Sandra
PEARL DOLES BELL

The Great Beginning
URSULA BLOOM

Vagabond Harvest
URSULA BLOOM

Ash
CHARLES CANNELL

Barker's Drift
CHARLES CANNELL

The Guarded Woman
CHARLES CANNELL

The Two Maureens
DOROTHEA CONYERS

The Inscrutable Secretary
JOAN A. COWDROY

A King of Space
JOAN A. COWDROY

Tetherstones
ETHEL M. DELL

Carla Light
MAY EDGINGTON

The Justice of the White Sahib
HELEN M. FAIRLEY

The Painted Show
CICELY FARMER

Waters of Fayle
CICELY FARMER

Lady Jane and the Small Holders
M. E. FRANCIS and M. BLUNDELL

Young Dave's Wife
M. E. FRANCIS and M. BLUNDELL

In Fear of a Woman
WINIFRED GRAHAM

Ninety and Nine Just Persons
WINIFRED GRAHAM

The Mating of Marcus
MABEL BARNES GRUNDY

Grounds for Divorce
MARY HARDY

The Gates of the Strong
NEWMAN HARDING

Woven in a Prayer Rug
NEVILLE LANGTON

Miss Brandt, Adventuress
MARGERY LAWRENCE

Red Heels
MARGERY LAWRENCE

Across the Moon
HAMISH McLEOD

The Keeper of the River
HAMISH McLEOD

Woman to Woman
MICHAEL MORTON and PETER TRAILL

The Hill Beyond
HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

Ironwy and Her Lovers
HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

The Farm of Melchizedek
"RITA"

Ho, Sonora
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

Desert Justice
KATHLYN RHODES

Wild Heart of Youth
KATHLYN RHODES

We Who Believe
F. HORACE ROSE

As a Shadow Grows
F. HORACE ROSE

Dimity Hall
MRS. BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

Scarlet Sails
MRS. BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

The Garden of God
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Toto
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

The House in Garden Square
NETTA SYRETT

The Path in the Sun
NETTA SYRETT

The Pointed Tower
VANCE THOMPSON

The Tarnished Woman
VANCE THOMPSON

A Saharan Love Story
A. L. VINCENT

Comfort O'Connor
TREVOR C. WIGNALL

Thus Gods are Made
TREVOR C. WIGNALL

The Wonderful Wooing
DOUGLAS WALSHE

The Water Diviner
DOLF WYLLARDE

The Irrepressibles
CURTIS YORKE

What Came to Cinderella
CURTIS YORKE

The Box of Spikenard
ETHEL BOILEAU

The Immortal Flame
MARIE BJELKE PETERSEN

THE FARM OF MELCHIZEDEK

BY

"RITA"

(MRS. DESMOND HUMPHREYS)

Author of "Peg the Rake," "Calvary," etc., etc.

LONDON

HUTCHINSON & CO. (PUBLISHERS), LTD,

PATERNOSTER ROW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD.
THE ROAD TO ANYWHERE.
PAT THE PEDLAR.
CALVARY.
THE UNGROWN-UPS.
THE BEST LOVER.
CONJUGAL RIGHTS.
ETC., ETC.

Printed in Great Britain by Mackays Ltd., Chatham.

DEDICATION.

To

D. L. S. AND "A. D."

WITH SAD AND HAPPY MEMORIES

OF

JULY 17TH, 1923.

Bournemouth. Oxford. Bath.
1923—1924.

THE FARM OF MELCHIZEDEK

PART I

I

September 29th

You didn't believe me, Kit. You said I'd never do it. But you know, my dear, it's a dangerous thing to *dare* a woman. The spur acts like a challenge to impulse. Of course, I'm impulsive. We both know that. Result of union. A patient plodder and an erratic butterfly. Poor butterfly, of whom I know so little! and whose flight over our home-circle seems to have resulted merely in bruised wings, and a memorial cross. That—and a fortune wasted—means her *requiescat* (I think I mean *requiem*, but you'll understand).

With you away in France, and a few war records, I was at the loosest (somehow that doesn't look right, but there's no dictionary handy) of loose ends. Dad was more than usually hopeless. I should like to have *shaken* him, darling old foozler! . . . Then came a brilliant idea. *I* would go on the land. I would gather up the "fragments" that remained of our broken fortunes! My plan was to start a poultry farm. Learn how to manage it and make it pay. I searched advertisement columns. Interviewed and was interviewed by all sorts of impossible people. Was invited to purchase bankrupt stock as a "paying" concern. Met the guileless Hebrew, and the oily Gentile as "agents." Trained and motor-bussed to innumerable districts. Saw herds of poultry and flocks of feathers till my ears ached at crows and clucks and other idyllic noises. And still weeks passed and our limited capital grew more limited, and nothing feasible turned up. "Never the farm, and the bungalow, and the price together," as says, or ought to have said, one Signor Roberto Browning!

But—*pazienza*—said I, when Dad looked enquiringly at

letters, and papers, and sheaves of telegrams. It will come. The right man. The right place. The right broods of poultry. The attendant hen-runs, and houses, and trap nests and incubators! (You see I've been studying poultry papers, and acquired quite a reasonable stock of local colour!)

And, dearest of Kits—I was right. It *came*. Quite suddenly, by one of those accidents that make one believe in Luck. (I honour it with a capital "L.") Just an advert: an ordinary little notice in one of the journals that have sprung up as products of poultry industry. I saw it. I read it. I liked it. There was a business ring about it. Also no agent. Also—a personal inspection was invited! I took counsel with my solitary "forbears."

"This, Shirley," he said, "is where *you* come in." (Using my full baptismal significance, you perceive! Usually it's "Shir," or "Sherry.")

Seeking further information, I learnt that, for the first time, he recognised approval of an advert. in my explanation!

"You find something in this to your taste?" he added. "As the whole scheme is yours, I think you should personally inspect the place."

Well, Kit, in the limited sheets of a foreign letter there is no room for digression. So, to cut the whole story short, I went off on my own and—inspected.

It was just—well, *it*. The exact thing I wanted. A poultry farm of two acres, the quaintest of tiny bungalows set amidst a scattered colony of bungalows. The whole region was given over to poultry farms. *My* especial one was just a tiny bit larger, a tiny bit greener (in the way of lawns and shrubberies), a tiny bit more picturesque than the others.

I was met at the door (I motored over from the station, five miles away) by a venerable white-bearded patriarch. I never met a face more benevolent, or received a greeting more courteous. He invited me into the one "parlour," and there we discussed business and terms. My dear! . . . Two acres of ground, the stock and hen houses, and a bungalow for £800!

It seemed incredible. £2,000 was our limited capital, so that would leave £1,200 for the first year of trial. My patriarch hinted that—to the inexperienced—that first year generally was a trial. One had to learn the ways of birds, their ailments and requirements. Still, he would leave plenty of useful information for me, and I looked capable and energetic.

" One must be *that*," he added with the smile of Moses coming down from the Mount. " I, unfortunately, am somewhat a dreamer. My tastes are musical. This is not a neighbourhood of encouragement, or, indeed—appreciation. So I am going to sell off and go back to town. I have another farm," he added, " not quite of *this* sort. Pigs, and cattle, and a few acres of pasturage. My son manages that. It is not far. . . . He would be willing to give you any help or advice that you needed. Who will be with you, may I ask ? "

" My father," I said.

" Does he know anything about poultry farming ? "

" Nothing at all—— "

" And you ? "

" I've been reading up a lot of books and papers about it."

" You think you will like the life ? "

" I'm sure I shall. I love being out of doors. I want to do some useful work, and I love all animals."

He regarded me thoughtfully. " Fowls—scarcely come under that heading, do they ? You may find cocks and hens rather aggressive creatures. The bump of ' perversity ' is strangely developed in certain breeds."

" The advertisement said your stock was exceptionally fine ? "

" It is," he agreed ; " most exceptionally fine. I have a great variety of birds, and they possess characters as various."

" Are they good layers ? " I asked.

" Occasionally we have a hundred eggs a day. Sometimes only forty."

I felt my eyes widen. I calculated price of eggs as shop purchase. Here seemed a good paying industry at last !

" And you sell them—easily ? "

He explained the process. This was essentially a poultry farming colony. All eggs were taken by a depôt in the village, which packed, delivered, and paid for them according to arrangement. Large or small quantities. Besides the egg-laying industry there was another consideration. Selling the fowls themselves for table, or as breeders, or as good layers. Quite a lucrative little business, and living cost next to nothing. There was a universal providing shop where one bought everything, from tea and tinned meats to hairpins and reels of cotton. A butcher called twice a week. Vegetables grew in one's own garden—(with a little care and trouble). In the summer there was fruit.

" And milk ? " I asked.

"We nearly all keep goats. They give plenty of milk. It is excellent, and their keep is nothing in comparison with a cow."

Then he showed me over the residence; explaining the uses of oil as preferable to gas; the slight inconvenience of no scullery taps with the simple uses of a well. Of course, there was no bathroom. Merely a tub in one's own sanctum when desired. Water had to be heated on the oil stove, and it seemed to me that there might be difficulties when hot baths were needed. But that he explained away by use of a copper in the outhouse. One lighted a fire underneath, and then filled it and "decanted" it with a jug, or a bucket!

I was in no mood to scent drawbacks. I was just brimming over with enthusiasm. I felt I could be perfectly happy here, and that, once I had furnished and "fixed up" the darling wee house with chintzes and our own bits of oak, and a few old prints and bookcases, the charm would be complete. *Vive*—the Simple Life!

One room to live in, the kitchen to work in, a convenient little scullery with shelves and cupboards. A bedroom for Dad, another for myself, a queer *nook* that might be turned into a dormitory (or rather cubicle) on emergency (if you came for a week-end, Kit), and so on. Oh! I was forgetting—a verandah. A large boarded comfortable verandah—as useful as a room—in the front of the bungalow. One could live out of doors in the fine weather. It held a wooden table and some rough chairs.

"I sit here a great deal and compose my music," said the Patriarch. "I will leave you these. They will be no use in London."

Then we came right down to business. He suggested a deposit and I promised to send £50 as soon as I got home. Then I would bring Dad down to inspect and sign necessary documents. We wouldn't be bothered with agents or lawyers. It was quite a simple matter. The property was his. He made over the deeds to father, and it became ours.

Well, Kit, it all *happened*. There was no hitch of any sort. Dad also fell in love with the miniature residence. Left furnishing and fixing up to me and a "handy man" I had discovered in the village. He was a wonder, my dear. He put down carpets and linoleum, and helped in every way. Between us we got the furniture in, the beds up, the prints on a picture rail, the china into a cupboard, the boxes unpacked. He set the two-cylindered oil-stove going and explained how effectual it was

and how easy to work. He lit a fire and heated water. He showed me how to mix poultry food. He milked the goat (for which I was eternally grateful) and by some miraculous means he furnished the larder. I know there was cold roasted chicken and eggs, and a piece of boiled bacon, and bread and butter. How, when, or where had they come?

"It's Mrs. Malone—that cottage next door," he said. "I told her you were coming down to-day and would want something to eat."

Nice and neighbourly, wasn't it?

"Malone" sounded Irish. I enquired.

"Yes, she was from Ireland," he said. "A hard-working industrious woman, but brought into poverty and trouble by them Sinn Feiners. She did washing, or cooking, or cleaning, and her son (he wasn't quite 'all there'), attended to the poultry. She had a very poor show in comparison to mine, but they helped her to make a living."

Between all this I was getting things ship-shape. I had promised Dad to have the place ready in a day if he would let me go on in advance. I kept my word by aid of Jim Ganders (the handyman) and slept alone and fearless that first night of arrival, though Mrs. Malone offered herself as "company."

But I was determined on independence. I must begin as I meant to go on.

Now, Kit, I mustn't waste more time and paper over details. I only want you to know I've done what I said I'd do. If you don't believe, you must come and see me. . . . I'll give you a hearty welcome, and so will Dad; but I fear you'll laugh us and our "venture" to scorn! No matter. It's the best thing we could do, and it's more respectable than living "on the dole."

Your ever devoted

SHIRLEY.

* * * * * *

Later—Personal

My life is full of little duties and occupations. I have, of course, to run the house myself. Cook, and clean and wash up. See to the poultry; gather in the eggs, and number and *mark* them. (Dad will take that duty on presently; he has not quite settled down yet. At least, he *has* settled into the verandah, with a big, cushioned chair and a smoking table and his books and papers, but that's not what I mean!)

The weather is fine. The view beautiful. Green far-off hills and autumn fields, but the surrounding country is rather flat, and our village not very interesting. On all sides we have poultry farms of various sizes and importance. As yet there has been no time for walks or exploration. It is very quiet. The road is rather rough and stony. Very few motorists come by. " Society " is purely industrial. Everyone does something. There are very few *young* people. Most of the farms are occupied by middle-aged or retired-from-business folk. I believe there are one or two newly-married couples enterprising the industry. I may make their acquaintance later on. At present these birds and my house duties keep me fully occupied. The fowls seem to want a great deal of food, and so far have been very backward in their own duty of repayment. I cannot understand Mr. " Melchizedek's " assertion of one hundred eggs a day. I expressed my dissatisfaction to Mrs. Malone, who " drops in " of a morning to give any necessary help.

She listened, and her mouth took on that queer " twist " which often preludes her queer speeches.

" Faith, ye'd no business to belayve all *he* said. Words is often all ye'll get from thim schaymers as wants to be sellin' ye a bargain. Hundred, is it ? . . . I've seen him takin' thim to the daypot in a hand-basket. If 'twas a dozen from thim Sussex 'twas as much as they'd be yieldin'. If I was you, miss, I'd just sell off all that ould stock to the first dealer as may come along, and put in some fresh birds. Dacint hins as knows their duty and would be layin' and breedin' and not atin' up all the good food and nothing at all to show for it."

Fresh birds ? I stared at her.

" But I've bought all this lot of hens—two hundred and fifty altogether. Do you mean to say they're no use ? "

" Well, I wouldn't go as far as that, miss. But a poor lot for the layin'. They'll go broody soon, and ye'll have a hape o' trouble, and thim houses beyant, half o' thim isn't healthy. They want a good cleanin' out, so they do, and a bit o' tar and whitewash wouldn't do thim any harm."

" I thought they looked so—so nice," I faltered.

She remarked that a bit o' trellis and a few enamel bowls was all right to look at. " But you make an inspecshun of the perches, and undernayth thim nests. You'd find the hay all musty and mouldy save for that top layer Mr. Marsy would be scatterin'. Oh, he had the cunnin' ways, so he had, and I'm afeeard he tuk ye in, miss. I was wishful to say a wurrd, but

it was all over in a hurry, and him off with himself. You've not had his son around yet?"

"No," I said. "What is he like?"

"Not like his father. They weren't the best av friends either. He's got a nice bit o' land. The ould man rented it to him at a high figure, bekase it was 'pasture.' I wish he'd be seein' the green fields o' Kerry, and the lush sweet meadows of my home! Pasture? Harsh rough grass, and the bad stony soil it is. But he's a stout-hearted one that same young farmer. Works hard, too. Acres o' wheat and oats. He wouldn't be wastin' time over cocks and hins, nor them new-fangled incubaytors. Shame it is to see the poor young craytures strugglin' for life, breathin' in gasps, so to say, and dyin' by the score, and niver a mother for thim to creep to for shelter. . . ."

(Mrs. Malone's tongue runs on like a mill race once it begins.)

I dismissed her as soon as possible. I wanted to investigate matters for myself. Her words rankled. I began to feel distrust of my bargain; of the Patriarch whom I had nick-named "Melchizedek." His real name was Alexis Marsyas. I was curious as to nationality, but did not like to ask it. Dad suggested a Hebrew strain. He had merely mentioned Greece as home of his boyhood. But we were both too eager to secure and copyright our new property to question either ancestry or history of its original owner. He had hinted at family troubles. He had lost his wife. His only son was not "sympathetic." They could not agree. Hence the divided domiciles.

"I have done everything for him; but the War—that changed him. He was never the same after it. He has served in Egypt. He was wounded—rather badly. He is still lame. But possibly you will make his acquaintance. I will ask him to call."

I don't know whether the request was ever made. At all events, Melchizedek the Younger seemed in no haste to respond to it.

II

Still Personal

I COULD wish that weather had not such a material effect on one's outlook on life. Everyday life. The life that matters. "Silverhatch," as I had named our dwelling-place (it was painted in black letters on a white board and nailed to the main gate post), took on a very different aspect when skies were leaden and rain poured down in a solid stream. (Of course, that's wrong metaphor, but I'm in no mood for syntax and prosody !) It began to rain the day after I had written to Kit (who is my dearest and onliest friend) and went on raining. The result in mud and general slushiness baffles description.

As for the fowls—a more melancholy sight never greeted an enthusiastic poulteress ! (I have to invent new words to pass the time !) To-day they sat in rows, drenched, drooping, dismal. They have not, apparently, sufficient common sense to get into their houses and keep dry. Two or three cockerels, being young and foolhardy, strutted to and fro and did vigorous scratching work. I suppose to sharpen their claws. I have not yet discovered why fowls must scratch up the soil to the tune of unmelodious clucks. But all in good time. No doubt a day will come when I shall be as wise as themselves. Meanwhile, I watch and wonder.

We have been here just a week. It seems much longer. Probably because I've had so much to do, and everything is so strange and unlike our previous mode of living. The cooking I can manage well enough, but sometimes there is nothing to cook. The butcher fails to call, or else comes with something as unappetising as a sheep's head, or a pig's liver !

I shudder away from such exhibitions, and request sausages or chops. He has neither, so I send him away till next calling time. When I ask Dad what I'm to do he looks up vaguely from pipe or book, or the now much-valued daily journal, and says : "Nothing for dinner, my dear ? Oh well, let's have eggs."

He is fond of eggs. He would eat two or three plain, or fried, or scrambled, or omeletted, but—I have discovered that, of all commodities in the place, eggs are the scarcest, and most difficult to procure. They say seaport towns fare worst for fish. I suppose, by the same rule of supply and demand, poultry farms are the last places to supply eggs ! Certainly, our ladies are doing little in that line. I haven't made up a dozen to sell, yet Dad keeps asking for them to *eat*. I borrowed two for breakfast

from Mrs. Malone, promising to pay her back. She said I was welcome until I got "thim new birds." Now, I'm not at all sure about this plan of hers. I don't want to sell off my stock as soon as I've become its owner. And, even if I do, I am quite ignorant as to the sort of fowls to buy. You can't tell if a bird will lay before it *does* lay. You must take the dealer's word for it. I have done that already and it has proved unwise. Mrs. Malone never has a good word to say of "Melchizedek" or his farm. In her mind he represents all that is conveyed by such terms as "schayming" and "swindling," and she compassionates me as a victim. I wish she wouldn't. I don't like to feel I've been done. Still less do I like to worry Dad on the matter. He is so perfectly happy and content. To-day, Mrs. Malone "fixed him up" with a grand fire of logs and coal-dust, and there he sits in front of it with pipe and paper and intermediate snoozes. The whole working of house and farm he leaves to me.

"I won't interfere, my dear," he says at intervals. "You are quite capable of doing all that is to be done. If not, you must engage help."

I look at him. Help? I have a limited choice ranging from Mrs. Malone's idiot boy, to my handyman's much-requisitioned services. He seems to be the only carpenter, the only plumber, the only Jack-of-all-trades in the district. If anything goes wrong it's always, "send for Ganders," "ask Ganders," "order Ganders." Consequently, I find I must stand in the queue, as it were, and wait my turn.

"My dear Dad, it's one thing to say *get* help . . . it's another, and very different thing, to find it. You see, there are no servants, no outdoor hired labour in this place. What one wants done one must do oneself."

"And very well you do it—considering," he said with that angelic smile whose meaning I know so well!

Yes, considering youth, and inexperience, and handicap of sex. I shrugged my shoulders and went my way to the kitchen and boiled water to make hot mash for those bedraggled birds. It was not the regulation feeding-time, but they looked so miserable I thought they would not object. They didn't. Has any poultry farmer ever explained the marvellous *appetites* of poultry. They're ready to eat any time of the day, or, I believe, the night, if you'll only feed them!

I "shoo'd" them into their respective houses and closed the doors

"There! that's all you'll get to-day," I said, as I splashed manfully through ankle-deep mud and on to the back door.

I was confronted by a queer spectacle. A youth clad in oilskins, bearing the impress of disaster—if a bruised cheek and an exterior of mud held significance—was clinging to a machine which had once been a motor-cycle. It seemed to require reconstruction.

"Oh! excuse me——" His hand went to his cap, or rather, the place where his cap had been. He glanced round as if in search of it.

"Suppose I've dropped the bally thing! . . . ."

"What's happened?" I enquired. "A spill?"

"Looks like it. . . . Came down that incline a bit too soon. A man, a donkey and a cart . . . refused to move; the old machine was in a hurry . . . ." He pressed the palm of his hand to his brow. "Sort of entanglement. . . . Can't remember particulars. Anyway, he's still swearing, or was; most unfriendly. Never offered me any help. . . . I tried to get on, but somehow my head's queer, and the bally thing won't go. . . . I saw your cottage, and thought you'd let me rest a bit . . . and perhaps I could find someone to tinker up the screws, what? . . . ." He swayed slightly. I seized his arm.

"Come along in! You're in a very damaged condition."

"Bit squiffy; not the usual cause, I assure you. . . . Dashed queer, everything keeps going round . . . and round."

He stumbled into the kitchen, and I supported him to one of the Windsor chairs. He dropped into it with a groan. His face was ghastly.

"Sorry, but don't trouble. I'll be all right . . . in a minute."

"Would you like some water?" I asked.

"Any whiskey?"

I hesitated. There was a treasured half-bottle in the parlour cupboard, reserved in case of illness, for Dad's special use. But the duties of hospitality are imperative. I murmured "yes," and his gesture spoke gratitude. I hastened to fetch the precious liquid. Dad was asleep in his chair; the papers on the floor. He did not hear me at the cupboard and I wasted no time in waking him or explaining what I wanted. I returned to the damaged youth, and found him on the verge of a faint. The whiskey pulled him together; colour returned to his cheeks and lips. He gave a little gasp of thankfulness.

"Saved my life! . . . Back again in the jolly old world! You're very kind. . . . Absolutely first time ever had a spill. Wonder what the devil I m going to do! How many miles Oxford?"

"Oxford! So that's where you want to get to?"

"College, you know. . . . New term . . . Merton."

I was immediately interested. I had so nearly gone to Margaret's myself. But for 1914——

"It's about twenty miles. And your machine is useless."

He ruffled up his queer tawny hair and looked perturbed.

"Bally nuisance!" He shot out a wrist-watch. "I say . . . sorry to inflict myself this sort of fashion. Just trundled in through your gate, and came round to see if I could get shelter, while this rain buckets on. . . ."

He rose rather feebly.

"Do take off that wet coat," I urged. "And I will bring you some warm water to wash the mud off your face. Then you must come in and rest and get warm until the weather clears."

"You're awfully kind."

I was helping him with buttons and straps. The clammy garment fell to the floor. Relieved of it, he was just a slim, ordinary youth of some nineteen or twenty summers. He picked up the coat and looked ruefully at its condition. I suggested hanging it on the scullery door where its drips wouldn't matter on the brick floor. This he did, with many apologies.

"You can wheel your machine into the outhouse, if you like," I went on, as I heated some water on my oil-stove.

"Oh—it can stay where it is!" he answered.

"If you can't find anyone here to repair it what will you do?"

"That's a poser, eh? What shall I do—what can I do? . . . Give it you for scrap iron? . . . Any use on a farm? I suppose this is a farm?"

"Well—it's not an ironmonger's," I explained. "We've only just come. About a week; and I don t know the full qualifications of the village. There *may* be a mechanic, but I doubt it."

"No sort of garridge?" he grinned.

"I m afraid not. The inhabitants use a motor bus. It goes from the cross roads, near here. Then you arrive at a railway station, and if you have luck, get a train to Oxford. If it's gone I believe you can hire a car—of sorts, to take you there."

"Oh, seems all right!" he said cheerfully, examining his

injured visage in a small looking-glass I had fixed on the wall. "I say, I look a pretty rotten object, don't I? Wonder I didn't frighten you."

"I'm getting used to queer sights and sounds," I said.

"Well, that evens up. . . . Oh! do let me do that!"

He seized the kettle, and poured its contents into an enamel basin, standing in the sink. I left him to ablutions and went to my room for a clean towel, and a dressing-comb. After using these he displayed a remarkably pleasant face, redeemed by merry grey eyes and a humorous mouth from just—ugliness.

"There, old bean! . . . I—I beg your pardon, Miss——"

His blush was delightfully boyish.

"Gayle is my name."

"Gayle? . . . Seem to know it. . . . Not Shirley Gayle, are you, by any jolly old chance? Ripping if you were——"

"I am," I said. "But how do you know?"

"Why, Kit, of course! Kit and I are cousins; brought up together. . . . Brother and sisterly bis: Sported on the green, and all that. She told me about you. Jolly sensible girl, she called you. Quite unlike herself. But then, she's so damned pretty, isn't she?"

The remark was slightly tactless, but I drew no attention to inferences.

"I've always thought her lovely. How queer that you should be a cousin!"

"We might 'shake' on that as introduction. . . . Oh, just a minute! My hands aren't quite up to manicure standards!"

He returned to the basin and a square of Sunlight soap.

"It's quite—quite—bally romantic, isn't it? The coincidence. I'm most awfully bucked at the idea of meeting you! But why—on a farm, and——"

His eyes went to leather gaiters and strong boots. "So it's back to the land? That sort of stunt?"

"It's poultry," I said. "An industry this time—without rule of Government. I'm going to work this into a money-making business. I've bought this place, or rather, Dad has bought it for me, and I'm determined to make it a success."

"Of course you will, old thing!" he said cheerfully. "One's only got to look at you to see power, and determination and all that in your face. Jolly kind one, too! And to think you're Kit's wonderful friend and I'm her . . . well, seventy-five

per-cent-off 'wonderful'—cousin! Most surprising! What the books 'ud call a fortuitous circumstance!"

"That sounds a little more like Oxford," I observed.

"I know what you mean. Yes; I'm awful on slang."

"Perhaps it's vogue this term?" I said. "Like abolition of caps and hats. 'Bare heads,' they call you. To be seen in the High wearing any sort of head covering, well—you know it's simply not done."

"Jove! you're right. That's the way with 'em. I'm a bit new to the etiketts, but——"

He was swinging the Turkish towel to and fro as if working off superfluous excitement. I rescued it. The space around was sufficiently limited and the air sufficiently chill without the aid of a draught producer.

"Now, your hair," I suggested, offering the comb.

"Oh—thanks! . . . You really are one of the best. Think of everything and—no fuss. I do hate women to be fussy. My Mater is. Good old sort, but—no repose, if you know what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"Well, I'm cleaned up now," he said cheerfully, showing a sleek head, and damaged cheek. "Hope I don't look quite such a beastly tramp?"

"You must come and be introduced to Dad," I said. "And I'll get the tea. You've plenty of time. The bus doesn't start till five. Oh—your name?"

"Garth," he said. "Tony Garth—at your service."

"Kit calls you 'Toddles,' doesn't she?"

He grinned once more. "She does, and a few other odd bits that occur to her. Just as she calls you 'Sherry,' when it's not 'Bitters.'"

* * * * * *

I conducted him into our parlour. Dad was awake and had stirred up the fire to brightness. The little room looked very cosy. I made necessary introductions, and saw my damaged guest into a comfortable chair. Then I returned to the kitchen for tea preparations. It was a novel experience. Our first guest, and that he should be Kit's cousin! She had made casual mention of one by name, or rather nickname, for, as he had said, Kit has a rooted objection to calling anyone by their proper designation. "Toddles" was more correctly the Honourable Anthony Carlton Garth, if he were the youth I had heard of.

I cut bread and butter, and was thankful for a cake left by Mrs. Malone that morning. She was a good cook, and always offered to do any "extras" for me. As soon as the kettle boiled I made the tea and brought it into the sitting-room.

Dad and his guest were talking nineteen to the dozen. I imagine the young man was describing the qualifications of his machine, judging from various technical expressions. Dad, on his part, was reminiscencing about Balliol (which had been his college). He seemed delighted with a companion so interesting, and looked less "broody" and dreamy than of late.

I lit the lamp, and drew the curtains to shut out the dreary aspect of weather. Then I remembered I had not changed my "rough-and-ready," as I called it. In other words, an old serge skirt and a hideous blouse which made my working costume. I laughed to myself, thinking of the contrast to Kit. What would the youth think? . . . Not that it mattered.

That was a merry tea. The boy was such a delightful boy; dropping into affectations and politeness and then back to normal slang and oddities. He didn't seem quite sure what he was going to do at the University. As a Garth of Garth-Owen, and sole male representative of a declining family, he had been sent there by his guardian. His father had died while he was under age. He was good at cricket and fond of boating, but had no studious tastes, and little inclination for "honours," or those magical initials one sees appended to certain names and professions. Dad, of course, upheld those matters as all-important. If he had had a son——

The sigh that followed that old lament annoyed me. I failed to see what difference it would have made to his comfort or welfare.

"But you've got a jolly useful daughter," said the youth. "And running this place on her own, she tells me. Bit of all-right-poultry farming. I've heard there's a fortune in it."

"Scarcely that," said Dad, with a pained smile. "But if we make bread and cheese, and an occasional Sunday joint, we must be content. That war—ah, my boy—that war. It has much to answer for!"

He looked inclined for reminiscences of better days. I hastened to change the subject.

"I want to go over some of the colleges one of these days," I said. "I suppose one can get permission?"

"Of course. Quite all right. Just drop a line. I'll always

manage it. And you must come over for 'Eights Week,' and see the river at its best!"

"But all that's a long time off," I said. "We've got all the winter before us."

"And I hope you'll use it for study, not entirely for recreation," said Dad. "The best time of your life . . . the student's days, the splendid opportunities——"

"If youth Would; if age Could," I murmured *en paraphrase.*

"Well, I'm not much of a lad to grind," observed Tony. "Like to hop it, don't you know. Sports; a jazz; the theatre. Rooms outside, so not too much blasted proctor—Oh! pardon, I mean watchful. You must come and see me, Mr. Gayle. Come to lunch. The old woman's not half bad. Husband's a caution. Make a good archdeacon, I always tell him. He says: 'Yes, sir; that is what I should have chosen had it been possible.'"

"Evidently a character." Thus Dad, smiling at excellent mimicry.

"Oh, priceless; really. If I were one of those writing chappies, I'd use him for a book. But—(he shook his head)—I'm not clever in that way. Still, you come to lunch and Miss—Shirley, of course. Seems more natural to call her that. D'you mind?"

"Not at all," I said. "Shows that Kit introduced us."

"Yes, in a way, and makes me dashed glad of that old bike accident. Heard so much of you—both—(that was a diplomatic touch). Kit said you were the nicest people she'd ever met."

"Your cousin," observed Dad, "is a very beautiful young lady. Is she still abroad?"

"Cap d'Antibes," he said, "for health. Lungs a bit squiffy. Can't stand fogs. My Mater's there, too, sort of looking after her, and her mother."

"Yes, Lady St. Aubyn is rather delicate, I believe."

"Ever met her?"

"No. I only know the daughter as Sherry's school friend."

"Sherry?" The boy's eyes twinkled. "Do you call her that? Brown, I suppose? Hair and eyes——"

"And face," I said. "It's pretty well tanned."

"So, so healthy, said Dad.

"So—well—suitable," mumbled the boy. "One expects it, you know. Up at cock-crow and all that."

"It's not so idyllic as it sounds," I said. "They certainly make noise enough. I get no peace till they're fed."

"Do you do that? Give 'em their bran mash, or whatever it is?"

"At six o'clock," I said. "And they're so ungrateful they won't lay eggs for me."

"Always thought that was what fowls were for. Sort of can't-help-themselves. Here's a nest. Let's plop down an egg."

"There are plenty of nests," I said, "but the 'plopping down' doesn't seem a popular industry."

He laughed suddenly.

"Bally good . . . plopping, popular. Sort of alliteration. D'you happen to write poetry?"

"No; Dad does—occasionally."

"Mere rhymes . . . little off-shoots," disclaimed my parent. "Scarce worth the name. Once I had ambitions; literary ambitions . . . faded, alas! . . . passed into the shadows of might-have-been . . ."

"I say, it seems awfully jolly clever, writing poetry. Wish I could. I love old Kips and Robert Service and Alan Lindsay; that sort of stuff. . . . Wonderful, how they just get the word and the sense, and the—what you call it—rhyme! Bally queer what some chaps can do, and some can't!"

"Our gifts, like our lives, are ordered by some unknown power," observed Dad, pedantically.

"Eh? I suppose so. Why pay rent? Live in someone else's house, and *owe* it . . . that sort of thing?"

Dad looked puzzled. "That wasn't quite what I meant to convey, Mr.——"

"Tony, I'm generally called."

I gurgled with suppressed laughter. These two gave me infinite amusement.

"Sorry; not quick on the uptake, I'm afraid. Miss Shirley's laughing at us. My head's not my strong point. Specially when it's had such a knock as that bally old machine gave me."

"It has been swelling for some time," I observed. "Your forehead, I mean. Would you like vinegar, and brown paper? Old-fashioned, but helpful."

He touched his temples with careful fingers.

"Bit rocky. The archdeacon'll think I've been handling the gloves again. But I won't bother you any more, dear old things. Quite too awfully good you've been. If I can manage to catch that motor bus——"

He glanced at his time-keeper. "Oh, I say, half-past four,"

"The cross-roads are not three minutes from here. So you've plenty of time," I said.

"I'm sure you wouldn't deceive a poor wanderer." He laughed. "Can't think how I came to roll over these parts. Thought I was at Aylesbury."

"Just the opposite direction," I said.

"Well, I'll remember another time."

He rose. "I must see to the bally old twister. Sorry to claim house-room, but if inconvenient—shove it outside."

"Where is your machine?" asked Dad.

"In the outhouse," I said.

"I'll be round to-morrow, first thing. Get hold of a car and be here inside of an hour."

I helped him into his oilskins, and then slipped on my own waterproof.

"I'll see you to the bus," I said. "You don't know the road, and we've no lamp-posts."

"Oh, but really! No, you mustn't——"

I cut him short.

"You might get giddy again?"

"Oh, no fear! That stoup of malvoisie quite bucked me up!"

And having said adieu to Dad we sallied forth.

III

Some Notes

Of course, that Kit's cousin and Kit's friend should meet in the manner described is just one of those things that happen in a book, but never in real life.

I am sorry, as editor-in-chief of Shirley Gayle's records, to have to assert anything so banal as that *reality* is more fictional than fiction. But so it is, or was, for proceeding onwards from that memorable afternoon come other incidents of experience.

Let no one think a poultry farm is without interest. It is full of it. Something's always happening. Three radiant days of sunshine followed that downpour and, though the birds seemed to enjoy it and their appetites were beyond praise, they

steadily refused to do what well-organised hens should do, *viz.*, "be fruitful and multiply, and replenish their—nests."

"Perhaps the food is wrong," said Tony Garth, paying his promised visit, in company with a mechanic from our nearest town. "Try some Karswood spice. I see it advertised all over the fences and walls."

"That's what I *am* giving them."

"They look spry enough, don't they? Quite a lot, too. How many do you reckon you've got?"

"Over two hundred," I said. "And, as yet, four eggs."

"Must be the close season. Like salmon, you know; or pheasants. They'll start off presently, I expect," he added brightly. "Why not try a bally incubator?"

"That's for hatching!" I said. "You've got to have your eggs——"

"——before they can incubate? I get you! . . . More in the bis. than meets the eye."

We strolled on. He was flourishing a light cane. Occasionally he made play with it, and poked an industrious hen into remonstrance.

"Rouse 'em up . . . do 'em good," he said. "What's all that noise about over there?"

"I think Mrs. Waddles must have laid an egg!"

I hurried to the hen house. He followed.

"Mrs.—who?"

"I've named some of them," I said. "I want them to get to know me. To see I take a friendly interest in their welfare. We name our cats and dogs and horses. Why not our fowls?"

"Jolly good idea. Make 'em tame. No trouble when you want 'em for milkin'—I mean market. Dilly-dilly, come and be killed. I remember my old nurse saying that! Where is Mrs. Waddles?"

I pointed to a fat brown dame standing by a nest and trumpeting loudly of achievement.

"Isn't she a funny old thing? She *does* waddle. She's so fat."

"Dropsy, I should say."

His eyes grew pensive. "Oh yes . . . decidedly dropsical! You've overfed her."

"She was like that when I took possession," I said indignantly.

"Then the old Johnnie—what's that you call him?"

"Melchizedek——"

"Biblical? Comes from Mespot, doesn't it? Family, I mean——"

"Greece, he told me."

"Ancient Greece and a poultry farm in Oxon! Bit of a hero, what?"

"He has a son somewhere on the earth," I said. "I've not come across him yet. He was to call and help me, but he hasn't done so."

"Probably knows the jolly old patriarch has biffed you!"

"I wish you wouldn't say that! You've no right to suppose——"

"Oh—I apologise! Only, seems to me there's something wrong with birds if they can't lay! What about the other lots round here? Seem a good few———"

"I've no visiting acquaintances," I said loftily.

"Oh, I say! Be a sport. Don't stand on dignity. Just click round and say: 'Mind telling me how many eggs your birds are yielding?' There you are, you know. Right down to bedrock!"

"If they would tell the truth?"

"Why shouldn't they? All in the family, I mean the—what's that dashed word—community."

"But I hardly belong to that—yet."

I was diving into the nest, still warm from tenancy of Mrs. Waddles. Yes. She *had* done it. . . . I drew forth an exhibit triumphantly.

"Isn't it a bit under size?" asked Tony. "I should talk to her. Fraudulent dealing. Had she her full share of the self-producing?"

"Of course!" I said angrily. "I must look for another—egg, I mean. Dad would eat three of this size for supper."

"Supper?"

"Our evening meal," I translated.

"Oh—ah, yes . . . so rural, of course! No bally four-somes and evening togs and fal-lals."

I presume he meant a four-course meal. Which was certainly beyond my culinary efforts.

I now turned to Mrs. Waddles, standing in patient expectation of comment on her performance. "Thank you," I said gravely. "But would you mind trying a larger size next time?"

She eyed me with mild rebuke, and cackled her opinion of people who were never satisfied. Tony (as he made me call him) drove her off to what he called the "Scratcheries." Here

my flock spent most of their time, tilling the soil in their own peculiar fashion, and seeming to derive much satisfaction from dust baths.

"I say, old thing——"

I glanced at my companion. There was something pained, uncomfortable in the expression of his nose. He had been looking round the long poultry house with its perches and nests. Now he pointed to those perches. My glance followed the gesture enquiringly.

"Don't they want a wash of Condy or something?" he asked. "Not exactly correct boudoir atmosphere for the ladies, eh? I'd get some buckets and sluice round, if I were you. That straw, too . . . mouldy as old bones. Look here! I bought this at the station . . . thought it might interest you." He took out a small pamphlet from his pocket. "How to keep and how to feed poultry," he went on. "I dipped into it. Just curiosity, you know. See here. *First*—and most important rule—'That the fowl-house is water-tight, well ventilated and clean.' *Second*—'That the covered shed for them to shelter in has plenty of gravel and hot ashes.' *Third*—'Feed regularly, but do not *over*-feed.' *Fourth*—'See that they have plenty of clean, fresh water, and an ample supply of green food'——"

"I've read all that in my own poultry journals," I said. "They've taken the place of the literature of the day that once meant a Smith's subscription."

"Well, old bean, if you have, it don't seem as if you've laid it to heart. What I mean is, one couldn't call this hen-house 'well ventilated' or the perches"—(he shook a disapproving head) "clean. That would be a bit far-fetched in the way of description. As far as the 'dust bath' goes, you're up to Class A, but I don't see the 'ample quantity' of green food our friend recommends."

I waxed indignant.

"Look here!" I said. "Before you take upon yourself the office of critic, I'd like you to have a little practical experience. These houses are cleaned out once a week——"

"I'd have 'em disinfected as well," he murmured.

"——by Mrs. Malone's boy," I hurried on. "But this is my third week of occupation and I . . . have a suspicion that he neglects his duties."

"I should say you're up against it," he agreed cheerfully. "Certainly a case of neglect. Cut his screw. No work, no pay,

makes Jack a bright boy. Afraid that's a bit mixed, but you know what I mean. You require a trustworthy, careful helper, or you'll never carry on this business. Wish I was a bit nearer. I'd lend a hand. It's rather rotten you're having to do it all yourself!"

"Women are making small fortunes out of poultry farming," I said grandiloquently. "It only needs patience and a little intelligence—— Good gracious! here's Mrs. Waddles back again. I wonder what she wants?"

"Possibly to lay the fellow-twin of that little Johnnie."

"She's not quite happy," I said. Then I addressed her in the vernacular I affected. "No, no, my dear; not go roosty, not yet. . . . Go back and scratch theeself. Go 'ee now . . . do as Missis tells 'ee."

Tony Garth regarded us both with eyes of distraction.

"I'm blow—, blessed! I mean . . . if she doesn't seem to understand you!"

"Of course she understands me, and so does Mr. Timothy. I'll point him out presently, and lots of the others."

"'Mrs. Bond had a pond,'" quoted Tony. "I suppose there's a sort of magnetism, eh? . . . Next time I'll see 'em all following you like a flock of sheep. Goin' to market of their own free will. 'Dilly, dilly, come and be killed!' More in that than met the eye of childhood's days."

"It's the only thing about poultry farming that I dislike. To rear them and feed them and get to know their whimsicalities, and find they know *you*, and then—have them killed and plucked, and cooked for other people. Horrible!"

"But if you keep them they'll only get old and useless, and cease laying, and die of inactivity."

"I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right. It's old Nature—'red in tooth and claw and beak,' as some Johnnie puts it. Bucks you into life and then says: 'Here, clear out! I want your room for another occupant . . .' Rummy business altogether. Sounds as if I'm getting the wind up, but don't take any notice. I get that way, sometimes. Suppose the bally grey matter gets churned up, eh what?"

"Shows you *do*—think."

"Think? Oh, yes. Oh, quite so, rather. Done quite a lot since I came to the jolly old 'Varsity."

"You might end in taking honours," I said cheerfully.

He looked alarmed.

"Oh no, dear old thing; not that! Not that; not by any means *that*."

"Here's your mechanic coming," I said. "Let's hear his report of your machine. I hope it can be mended. They cost a lot?"

"Stood me in for a hundred and fifty. As yet only on deposit, but I'm expecting a reminder any old time."

We strolled across a damp strip of grass and met the gentleman in overalls, who had come to report.

He gave hope. There was a brief technical discussion. I went indoors with my small contribution from Mrs. Waddles.

Tony's hired car was placed at my disposal after lunch.

The offer was tempting. I had, as yet, seen little of the neighbourhood, and motoring was one of my forfeited luxuries since times had changed and not for the better. We had a "scrap" luncheon of anchovy paste sandwiches, brawn, and a fruit salad. We drank tea.

"I must get back by hen-feeding time," I told my chauffeur. "Five o'clock."

"Oh, I say! It's gone two now. What's a couple of hours? Isn't there anyone else can do the bran-mash trick?"

His eyes fell on Dad. He looked anxious but not helpful. He suggested Mrs. Malone or her son. It did not occur to him that he might mix the meal or scatter the grain for once.

"I can't trust that idiot Pat," I said. "He hasn't even cleaned the hen-houses. . . . I'll have to send round for Ganders to-morrow."

Dad signified that I gave too much consideration to the feathered creatures. They weren't worth their keep, so far. He thought a little less food might be a serviceable hint to do their duty.

Acting on the suggestion, I left a limited quantity of dry mash in the feeding troughs and ran in to Mrs. Malone to request her services. An occasional shilling, or half-crown was always welcome. I also took the occasion of reminding her of Pat's remissness. She promised to be "afther him with the broom-stick" if he didn't clean up this afternoon.

Then, with a hint to Dad that tea and etceteras were all ready in the kitchen and he need only boil the kettle, I set off.

My first holiday for many strenuous weeks. How I revelled in it; the sunshine, the fresh sweet sting of the air; the comfort and speed of the little two-seater!

We sped along a flat, fairly good road, circling the poultry colony and leading to the village. The housing potentialities of the place showed an unrelieved effect of brick or wooden bungalows, built merely for exigencies of shelter, with no pretence at architectural effects. All of them bore the sign-manual of industry. Poultry farms and poultry farms, and again poultry farms. Some of the dwellings were so small that one wondered how the habitants accommodated themselves. An occasional army hut, or a disused railway carriage added their quota to the housing problem. The village itself was a mere jumble of a Post Office, a grocer's, and a general dealer's. At one end a tin-roofed, flamboyant effort bore the insignia of Entertainment Hall, and intimated that it could be let for whist-drives or dances.

Tony slackened speed to survey it.

"Who says you're behind the times? Jovial old jazz band, no doubt; and bridge? I shouldn't be surprised. Well, there you are, old thing. No need to moult on your perch. Here are excitement and interest and society all for the asking. When the little dicky birds are in bed and asleep, their kind and watchful guardians take their turn at the giddy wheel of life. We'll get up a concert one day. I *can* sing, and two or three of my pals are quite brainy and could do a turn with any old music-hall Johnnie."

I laughed.

"I'll have to reside here a little longer and get to know the ropes before I presume to offer an entertainment."

"Well, think of it. I'm game whenever you want me. Imitate George Robey—'Desist!' Harry Tate—'Selling a car.' Oh! we'd rouse 'em up no end. Get hold of the vicar and tell him it's for the school. Sure to be a vicar and a school if you look around. Haven't seen a church, but I expect there is one."

"Two miles off—so Melchizedek informed me."

"We'll have a look round. Which way d'you think? So bally flat, one can't get a proper outlet into one's head."

"Never mind," I said. "Just go on."

We went on, and yet on. The country improved as we drew towards Bampton and Witney and then sped through twisting roads and scattered villages, while far off, under the autumn sky, the great range of the Cotswolds spread like a protecting rampart.

I leant back, wrapped in supreme content of the moment.

Surely that is the best thing we can do with life. Accept its good gifts in thankfulness and live in the joy of each passing hour, remembering that it *must* pass, and we shall only gather its full meaning when we look back on it from some landmark of remembrance.

IV

That Night

We must have made a circular route of many miles before stopping at a little wayside inn for tea.

It was served to us in a quaint parlour, reminiscent of dead ages and past glories. But I fear neither I nor my companion was interested, architecturally, in a district that would have delighted an archæologist. The old dame, who brought in tea and thick bread-and-butter and home-made cake, told us of a church near by that had some pretensions to fame in the way of brasses and monuments and windows, but Tony waived aside the suggestion.

"I come from Oxford. I'm fed up with architecture. All we want here is a decent cup of tea."

She gave us that. We ate and drank with youth's hearty appetite, and discussed our individual interests with youth's sublime egotism.

I failed to discover any special ambition of Tony's, or any special reason why he should have come to the University, unless it was that the "family" always sent their sons there.

After tea he produced a motor map and we traced "routes," and found that my property lay within eighteen miles of Oxford by one route, and the distance could be achieved in three quarters of an hour.

"So I can run over and look you up any time," he said cheerfully.

"Twice eighteen is thirty-six," I observed.

"Nothing with a good car. The old bike would have done it in thirty minutes."

"I hope not, if any road patrols are about."

"Oh! take the risk of that."

So we took it.

We found our way back to the poultry-farming district more by good luck than attention to route, and I no longer wondered that Tony's acquaintance had been the result of confusion between north and south. I took pains to point out a more direct method for his return journey, but he had an enthusiastic belief in "short cuts." I feared my trouble would be unrewarded.

The roads were not good. I was severely bumped. He stopped suddenly and invited me to "look round." I stood up and surveyed a landscape unremarkable and flat; covered everywhere with the insignia of one special trade. Bungalows and poultry enclosures; wire-netted miles of industry. A sparse growth of timber; spreading fields, and the occasional farmhouse of English agricultural districts. We turned a corner.

"Quite a 'bis,'" said Tony. "To every man a hundred Sussex or two; to some tenants a goat. I see no cows or spreading fields."

"One," I said, pointing to a grey stone farm house, set amidst grass meadow and orchard. "I've not noticed that before. I wonder who lives there?"

"Shall we call and leave cards? It has an air of importance."

"Don't talk nonsense. Just drive slowly by—if you can."

He did his best. I had long since discovered the arid qualities of soil; stony, and sharp with flints and lumps of marl. It was a surprise to see green pasturage and wooden fencing; grazing cattle instead of the inevitable hens and cockerels of varying breeds. The farmhouse itself was of dull grey stone. So much a part of the landscape that it might well have escaped notice. Its roof was lichened and moss covered. The house showed a wide porch and small, deep-set windows.

"What a lovely old place!"

Tony grunted. "Don't see much beauty in it! It looks sixteenth-century if anything; chimneys all crooked too, and the roof——"

"But a garden!" I cried rapturously. "A garden *here*. Do you know I haven't seen a flower since I came!"

"Jove! Haven't you? I'll bring you a few dozen pots next time."

"Not *pots*. There's nowhere to put them, and I'm sure nothing would bear transplanting into our soil. This——" I waved my hand—"speaks for itself. All cultivated." I added: "Now I know where we get our milk."

I saw out-buildings; a dairy; shelters, as well as a poultry

yard. Evidently some well-to-do farmer occupied this desirable spot. As we stood up in the car making our observation a man came out carrying a bucket of grain and proceeded to distribute it.

"What beauties!" I exclaimed. "Not many, but such fine breeds. Wyandottes, Leghorns, just those——"

"How the dickens do you know? I could never tell one fowl from another, except, of course, the red-combed chaps who strut about to look after their wives!"

I laughed softly. "I told you I was learning up my subject. You can't start poultry farming without a little knowledge of poultry."

At that moment, whether by accident or not, Tony touched the motor-horn by his wheel. It gave out its hideous warning. By doing so it startled some of the white ladies who had flocked together for their evening meal. One suddenly started to run. She not only ran but took a flying leap. . . .

"Gosh! what's the blighter doing?" gasped Tony.

She was speeding full speed across our road as if bent on reaching Oxford at all hazards.

The owner shouted to us, waved an imperative hand. "Stop her, catch her! She's *new*. . . . She doesn't know——"

Tony jumped down and went off in pursuit.

Now there are few more amusing spectacles than that of a male human in pursuit of animal or feathered trophy. Tony on the verge of capture—Tony dodging the navigations of the hen—Tony clutching, failing, sprawling, swearing—was really something to waken the laughter of fools or wise men alike if any chanced to be spectators!

It was a race novel and remarkable. The owner of the ostensible champion came stumbling towards the car, passed, and joined in the pursuit.

I had rapid vision of a tall, rather thin man, with uncovered head; a dark, angry-looking face, and small pretensions to agility. I was laughing so much that I could only collapse on the seat and pray the "best man might win."

Was she a valuable bird, I wondered? or possessed of the merely amiable qualities of my Mrs. Waddles? Anyhow, she seemed determined to give them a run for their money. Tony was trying to round on her by one of his favourite short-cuts, and thus steer her back to her own roofstead. The owner, or so I supposed him, evidently detected this manœuvre, and lay in wait at the turning-point of his entrance gates.

Strangely enough, Tony was succeeding. He had the situation well in hand. He sprang forward, drove her back on her course with much flapping and outcry until, giving it up as a waste of energy, she dropped into a walk and her wary owner practised the trick of " the clutching hand " and captured her. He bore her past the car. She was emitting a series of sardonic chuckles as he came up to me. He paused.

" I'm so glad," I stammered, amidst hysterical giggles. " Most fortunate—— "

" Your friend was very kind to help me," he said. " This bird is rather wild and easily startled." (The lady croaked a hoarse affirmative.)

" You should clip her wings," I said. " Then she couldn't fly over your fence."

" You know something about poultry, then ? "

" I've just taken a poultry farm."

I looked in the direction of our colony of industry. " Over there," I said. " Of course you know it. We all keep fowls, and all hope to be ' best sellers ' in the way of egg-producing."

He flashed a sudden keen glance at me. His eyes were as dark as his hair, which was of a curious black-satiny nature. It rippled back from his forehead in a sort of Owen Nares fashion. A good-looking man.

" Are you by any chance the owner of Silverhatch ? " he asked.

" Yes. But I'm quite a new-comer, and everything is rather—experimental at present."

" I—I expect it is.. I happen to know who sold it to you."

" Mr. Marsyas ! " I exclaimed. " Oh—you're not by any chance—— "

" His son ? Yes, I am. I own this farm, or I should say I rent it. The real owners have gone to Canada. My father bought it."

" He spoke of you. He suggested that you might give me some—some advice."

A hint of a smile greeted that remark.

" You will find plenty of your neighbours able to do that. I shouldn't believe all they give, or the experiments suggested. As far as I am concerned, my interests lie with agriculture, not poultry ; though I have a hundred or so here."

" They look splendid birds. Mine seem rather common-place."

" If you bought my father's stock, they are."

His mouth looked stern. "I wish—I wish I had known. I would have advised you—— "

"It's not too late, is it?"

"It is if your purchase is completed."

"I meant for—advice."

"What have your birds done, so far?"

I thought of Mrs. Waddles' effort, of Uncle Timothy's insatiable appetite.

"Not very much," I faltered.

"Nothing for market, I suppose?"

"No; just for our own consumption."

"Who helps you run the place? I mean you're not living there alone?"

"Oh no! My father lives with me."

"I see you have a car—— " He paused as Tony joined us, panting and dishevelled.

"Corking good bird to run. Hope she's none the worse?"

"Your brother?" asked my new acquaintance.

"No—a friend. This is his car."

They exchanged greetings.

"I'm much obliged for your trouble."

"Well," said Tony, "I'm afraid it was my fault to begin with. That tooter of mine's a bit of a scream when you're not used to it."

"We don't often have motors hereabouts," said the "Owen Nares" prototype. "Be quiet, Elizabeth!"

The remark seemed addressed to the captive who had just remonstrated with capture.

I laughed suddenly. "Oh! do you name them also? I'm so glad. Dad laughs at me for doing it, but really some fowls seem to *ask* for names."

"And they soon learn to know them," he said. "Yes, I have my favourites; not a large show, as you see—— " He glanced at the feeding yard.

"Jolly fine ones, though!" interposed Tony, having recovered breath once more.

"Yes; few, but good. They're worth their keep. A great many are not, as you—" he looked at me almost attentively—"will find out before long."

"She's doing wonders, so far!" exclaimed Tony. "Jolly hard work. I'd no idea poultry meant such a lot of trouble."

"You're not exceptional. Most people think eggs are a

natural product, and chickens require nothing but a coop and a scratching place."

"That's what I thought," said Tony. "Buy a few birds, turn them into a field, tot up a scrap of wire netting, and let 'em scratch up worms."

The owner of Elizabeth looked slightly contemptuous.

"How are you off for hen houses?" he asked me. "And coops?"

I explained our shortage, and that my handy man had told me he would make a few hen-coops, if I wished.

"There are about two hundred and fifty fowls altogether," I added.

"This is the worst time of year. You needn't expect any layers till after Christmas. From what I remember of the farm I should say sell off half of them, and buy a hundred or so Wyandottes, or Leghorns. Rhodes are fine birds, too, but a bit expensive."

I am afraid I looked rueful. I had not taken over my farm and stock with any idea of fresh purchases.

He noticed my expression, I think.

"Sorry to seem disheartening, but I've bought my experience, and so have many others."

Here Elizabeth manifested signs of impatience.

"If you'll excuse me," he said, and moved off with that gesture of hand to head reminiscent of khaki days.

I nodded. Tony uttered a careless "cheerio" as he returned to his steering-wheel. We saw the restoration of Elizabeth and immediate search for a neglected supper. Then off we sped again, as the lengthening shadows spoke of approaching twilight.

Once more back at Silverhatch Tony rushed in to see to his damaged motor-bike. The man had not removed it, nor did it seem to be in a more hopeful condition.

I found Dad had managed to get his tea, and that the poultry had been fed, and were scuttling off to their perches.

My mind at rest for the time, I bade farewell to Tony, and reminded him of lighting-up. He declared he would be back at Oxford before that necessary trouble, and having had a few words with Dad he departed.

"A nice boy," said my parent, smiling at a farewell "toot" from the roadway. "So bright and cheery. I looked for an egg with my tea, my dear, but I couldn't find one. It seems odd to be living amidst a colony of egg-producing factors and yet be—eggless!"

I told him of times and seasons ; of obstinate birds and tricks of nature. He sighed and hoped I hadn't done a very unwise thing in taking on such an unstable business.

I felt hurt. My new acquaintance had not heartened me to begin with, and now these murmurings of regret added to my depression. So I washed up the tea-things, lit the lamp, and proceeded to write to Kit of my day's adventures.

* * * * * *

After Relating Aforesaid Adventure.

"But oh ! Kit, my dear, have you the slightest notion of what this poultry business *means* ? Of course you haven't. No more had I until I embarked upon it. Four weeks of chicken-farming have only succeeded in showing me how exceedingly precarious it is to set about rearing chickens. First, of course, you must have eggs. That means good layers. Then you await the dramatic moment when your industrious bird becomes 'broody.' If times and seasons are propitious you set her in a nest and hope for results. If—as at present—there is inclement weather to combat, you discourage her natural instincts. Added to this, I was obliged to have the houses thoroughly cleaned and repaired and fresh wire-netting fixed so as to keep my own treasures in safe boundary. Then —to make or purchase coops ; to find out the right sort of food ; to separate diversities of breeds. To kill a few marketable products (a performance relegated to Ganders). To read, mark, and digest all the copious information of poultry journals. Finally, to assure oneself of never-ending work, and never-ending anxiety respecting one's feathered flock !

"There ! I have unburdened my mind and feel better.

"You see I dare not show signs of faltering to my revered parent. I have no confidant on the spot with whom to exchange forebodings, and I dare not be too sure of success in my venture as I hear on all sides how very much of a venture it is ! Of one thing I feel certain, and that is that I ought to have a strong steady sort of man, or youth, to assist me during the coming winter months. Dad is hopeless. He has decided on the 'studious life,' and fireside comfort. He is quite incapable of undertaking the rough outside work necessitated by this industry. I am afraid to trust Pat, and Ganders is so much in request that he can only give occasional help. So that early rising and the boiling of kettles and mixing of meal, and then feeding an exacting army of clamourers devolve upon me,

I look forward to winter days and dark mornings with excusable distaste. All the same, *I will go through with the matter*. Having put my hand to the plough, why—I must e'en drive the furrow. Your cousin is a 'gem' in his way, so encouraging and amusing, but he only keeps on saying: 'You must have some farm-house Johnnie to carry on.' Easy to say, but hard to do! First, one must find the Johnnie. Then comes the consideration of wages and food. Such things mean ready money in a place like this where cash payments are the rule and credit the exception. I tell myself—if I can hold out for a year, all will be well. But can I? I shall have to wait till the New Year for eggs in any quantity. I wonder sometimes what I shall do? . . .

* * * * * *

"Dear Kits,

"I left off this letter a week ago. I resume to-night in a more hopeful frame of mind. Let me explain. I gave you a brief account of my afternoon adventure and its result before plunging into a Jeremiad of lamentations.

"The discovery of that farm of "Melchizedek's" son was a discovery of interest. Its owner represented a decidedly interesting person *here*, in a place where the inhabitants are either elderly, or war pensioners, or hopelessly rustic. Of youth there is none, and of society in its accepted version less than none (which sounds what it is!). Furthermore, dear Kit, the poultry farm is *not* a thing of beauty. It is usually a somewhat arid and flat enclosure, covered by zinc-roofed hen houses and scattered coops, and miles of ugly wire fencing which, like all useful things, possesses merely the beauty of utility. The village I have described before. The discovery of this picturesque old farmhouse is quite a surprise. For it really *does* possess the charm of age and picturesqueness, and some fine old trees and grazing meadows. Cattle are scarce enough in this region to be noteworthy. It was the Manor House of the district in old times, when there had been a family and a family seat. Well, the one has died out, and the other represents merely a tenant who works on it and utilises it for commercial reasons. It is sad how the old places and the beautiful old mansions and estates are falling to the auctioneer's hammer, or the bids of war profiteers. Few of the old families can afford to keep up their establishments now. In many cases the only sons, or direct heirs, have been claimed as victims of the most unholy war that ever shamed civilised countries!

Small wonder that owners sickened of death duties and taxes and dearth of labour, and have sold off everything and gone abroad.

"The old names—the old prestige—all vanished just as their possessions have vanished.

"Do you ever look back, Kit? Do you ever think how safe and happy our fathers and mothers must have been in the dear old stodgy Victorian times? *Safe*! I think our Empire will never be *that* again. The late Governments have made enemies on all sides. Real kingliness and the *sense* of royal importance died out with our noble Peacemaker, Edward the Seventh.

"I expect you'll laugh at this. You'll wonder what's taken me, or my pen! Why—from chicken-farming and the discovery of a Manor House have I drifted into reminiscences of pre-war days? Really, I don't know why. Only that austere grey house, with its timbers and mullions and quaint porch, haunts my memory, and I find myself wishing that that stalwart young Greek with his fine-knit figure and black satiny hair were really its owner instead of a mere tenant. There was something lordly, possessive, about him. As if he saw things to conquer and meant to conquer them. And as I think of him the reek of moist earth comes up to my nostrils, and the faint scents of burning weeds and rotting orchard fruit. All the allure of country sights and sounds are in my brain to-night and weaving strange patterns of coming days and seasons. . . .

"I wonder if I shall be happy on my little poultry farm!

SHIRLEY."

V

Passage of Time.

ANOTHER week has passed.

We are now in November, and the mornings are dark and chilly, and the evenings drawing in.

I have had to search for a fuel emporium, which resolved itself into an order office, and promised coals if I would take a ton at a time. The difficulty is where to put them. Our outhouse contains already a copper, several bags of poultry food, sundry coils of wire netting, other sundries in the shape

of bowls, stools, casks and carpenter's tools. I consulted Ganders, who seemed for once cornered by a difficulty.

The coals must be under cover, and our space was limited, In the end he ran up another outhouse which would hold them. and added a strong door with a latch and padlock.

"There be tramps around, winter time," he said. "And other folks round about aren't above helpin' theyselves to an odd lump or two."

He was very proud of his coal house when complete, and it just held the quantity ordered. He packed it and stacked it, and broke the big lumps into small ones for the scuttles. I now used the kitchen range, and built up good steady fires in the parlour, greatly to the joy of Dad. He had developed a very studious fit, so I gave him the room to himself except at meal times.

I have found plenty to do. I've learnt the art of economical cookery by sheer force of necessity. It is wonderful how long a joint *can* last when there are only two people to partake of it. Wonderful, too, how much can be done with cold mutton, with potatoes, with winter salads, with all the odds and ends of tinned meats and soups and fruits with which I had stocked the larder.

Dad is that rare thing among men—a small eater, and an easily contented one. So I have no grumbling to put up with and no ultra-fastidious palate to cater for.

This morning I was busy over a cottage pie and its ingredients when a knock at the outer door startled me. Hastily wiping my hands, I opened it. Standing there was my "Owen Nares" of the Manor Farm. He wore shabby old khaki knickers and coat, and a slouched hat.

"Good morning. I was in this direction and so dropped round to see if I could be any help to you?"

I thanked him rather confusedly. I did not know what to say.

"I mean—if I could look at your stock—I might advise you what to keep and what to sell. I know what my father had."

I explained I was busy over dinner preparations. He offered to wait, and said he would stroll around till I was ready.

The beauty of an oil-stove is that you just prepare your dish, or dishes, put them in on various shelves, close your door and then go about your business! The cooking goes on of itself. Nothing is spoilt, or burnt, and when dinner-time comes round, hey presto! there *is* your dinner!

By the time I had put in my pie and a milk pudding and some apples for baking my friend had returned. I snatched up my rough tweed coat and went forth. I seldom wore any head-covering.

He was looking very grave. I noticed now that he walked with a slight limp.

"Just as I thought," he remarked. "More than half are quite worthless. You had better sell off and replenish for the Christmas market."

I was appalled.

"Sell off! But they look such fine birds, and they have begun to lay. I had a dozen eggs yesterday!"

"A dozen!" He looked contemptuous. "What did you do with them?"

"Oh! I'm keeping them for ourselves."

"A profitable business—if you're making it a business?"

"Of course I am. But everyone says I can't expect results for some months to come."

"I know some people with a stock of Anconas. They have about thirty birds. Some of the pullets began to lay last month, and will go on all the winter. They showed me last year's record. From January to December their total was three thousand."

"And I have two hundred and fifty birds! If they began to lay now, and went on all the winter, I'd have thirty thousand eggs!"

"They never did that in my father's time. I don't look for miracles even with you and Karswood."

"Yes; I give them that."

"So I saw by the packets."

"Don't you think my birds are in good condition?" I questioned.

"Admirable."

His voice was not enthusiastic. His eyes roamed over my flock rushing eagerly towards their recognised feeder. I disdained flattering attentions in my anxiety to find out why they were destined to be unprofitable.

After a brief conversation I came to the conclusion that his opinion of the Patriarch was less filial than contemptuous. He appeared to have had a fancy for buying and selling properties of all sorts and descriptions. Buying cheap; selling dear. This farm of mine had already changed hands. On the last occasion he had emptied a few crates of worthless birds into it

and advertised its "magnificent productive stock" with an eloquence to which I had fallen a victim.

His son did not spare criticism. I began to think I had undertaken too much. He said my hen-houses were unsanitary, to begin with. I told him of Ganders' endeavours and of my "idiot boy's" industry. He smiled, and somehow, looking at his smile, I forgot disagreeables and troubles and only thought how nice it was to have such an adviser.

As dinner-time approached, I asked him to share pot luck. Very courteously he declined. He had people to see; shopping to do; must catch the bus for Witney. So we said good-bye.

On the point of departure he turned, and gave a comprehensive glance over my "property."

"If I can find a purchaser for you, will you sell?" he asked. "I assure you it's only waste of time feeding and caring for these birds. Sell off now. Have a thorough clean up, build at least two new hen-houses, and by the spring you'll be doing something worth the name *and* the trouble."

I looked up at his tanned face, at his dark, serious eyes. (He was much taller than myself.) I wondered if he was right, and felt sick and sore over my own ignorance. Yet to take his advice meant a wholesale gift of my stock-in-trade. If his opinion was shared by an intending purchaser I could not expect any profit. Possibly—only loss. And then, how was I to purchase a fresh breed?

I stammered out these queries.

"Oh—that's easy enough. I could recommend some dealers, thoroughly trustworthy. They'll send you the birds——"

"On sale or return?" I asked.

He smiled. "Well, hardly that. But I would not recommend anyone I couldn't trust. My own lot came just from an order, and they've turned out splendidly. I could arrange with the same people. Their place is in Kent, thoroughly reliable."

"It's very kind of you——"

"But you're not *sure* why I should do this? I note distrust in your voice. I'm not surprised. One of the family may be no better than the other."

I grew crimson. "Oh no! I am quite sure I can trust you, but——"

Then I blurted out my money troubles. Ready cash was, of all things, the hardest to come by. He seemed aware of that.

"If I thought the sale of this lot might bring in enough for purchase of the others?" I hazarded.

"That is a little too much to expect. But I am anxious to help you. Let us put the matter on a business foundation. What is needful for re-purchase I will find for you. You can pay me interest if you please, but I shan't claim it. I feel so *sure* that you will make a prosperous thing out of this. . . . Won't you trust me?"

That look, the warm, firm handclasp, made of enterprise an amazing certainty.

"Of course I will trust you, Mr. Marsyas," I said.

"Not by that name though."

"It's yours, isn't it?"

"Unfortunately it is. But I would like you to think of me by another designation——"

"Yes?" I questioned.

"You may think it queer, but I like it better than—what you just called me. It's Tarquin——"

"Mr. Tarquin?" I mumbled it, rather surprised. But he was a surprising man.

"Yes—there's some more to it, but that will do at present."

"Tarquin"—and more to it. As I helped Dad to his share of the savoury pie I reflected on that name. It wasn't English, it wasn't Greek. It sounded familiar, and yet I had never come across it as a special individual label.

One had to say it over and over again before getting used to it. I seemed to hear Tony's remarks. "Too classical, old bean. Let's shorten it a bit." And forthwith the shortening would result in "Tark" or "Torks," or something of that sort.

After dinner I would look up the Encyclopædia. We had a Nuttall's for convenience. A single volume instead of a dozen means some difference in the space of a limited library.

As the meal progressed I mentioned my visitor of the morning. Also, his relationship to the Patriarch. But at this stage of acquaintanceship, I said nothing about his criticism of our poultry yard. That being very much my own concern, I thought it wiser to keep my own counsel. If a sale was negotiated I would, of course, have to give reasons for it, and to prove that it would be financially advantageous.

But the hour was not yet, nor the circumstances what Tony called "pro-pish."

I hazarded a question.

"What—I mean *who* was Tarquin? I seem to have read his history in school days, or am I thinking of the Tarpeian Rock? Anyhow, is it Greek?"

Dad lifted surprised eyebrows. "What on earth made you think of such a name! I believe it is Roman—possibly of Etruscan origin." (Oh! wonderful erudition!) "There was a Tarquinius Superbus. His son—but that isn't our concern. The name is certainly more Italian than Greek."

He rose and went to the bookshelf and took out the Encyclopædia. "We'll make sure," he said, and resumed his seat, while his baked apple cooled on its plate. "Um—yes—here we are. 'Tarquinius.' . . . Etruscan origin. Not Greek, you see. Now what put it into your head?"

"Simply that my new friend stated it was his name—with others," I added.

"An odd name. The father, you said, was Greek."

"Yes. And he married a French woman, and they are naturalised English people; at least, so he said."

"Is this son living in our neighbourhood?"

"He has the only decent farm in the place. An old stone Manor House, and—fields," I added. "Wonderful fields. Such a treat after these stony bare acres all around. Orchard, vegetables, cows, *and* poultry."

"It must be a large place?"

"It is, though I only recently discovered it. It's the other side of the village. You see a clump of trees, and then fences, Quite a lot of cattle. I expect we get our milk from there."

"Don't you *know*?"

"My dear Dad, everything here is done so quaintly! I find butter and milk at the door. I suppose one day there'll be bills coming in. Of course, I pay for the other things as I get them."

"Spare me details, my love," he said in a pained voice. "You were so *sure* of being able to manage the place that I prefer to trust to your professed abilities."

(Which may or may not be equal to the task, I said to myself.)

After clearing away and washing up, and mixing the mash and feeding those everlastingly hungry fowls, I felt rather tired. I promised myself a rest in the old wicker cushioned chair by the kitchen fire. No need to get tea till five o'clock.

Time for a good *think*.

But I had hardly settled down when the faint "toot" of a motor-horn told me of a probable visitor.

A few moments later Tony burst in.

"Well, dear old soul, how goes it? Say, you do look snug in here. A vile day outside. I mean wind. Whips your nose for you. Chilblains, I shouldn't wonder——"

He felt that feature of his face cautiously, and then drew off his fur-lined gloves.

"Record, this time," he remarked. "Thirty-five and three secs. I'd like to buy that little Morris, only I haven't enough ready, and my guardian won't fork out. I fear the old bike'll never be much good again. . . . 'Wrap me up in my old stable jacket, for here a poor buffer lies low.' All that—and what it's cost ever since I had the brute!"

He sat down on a Windsor chair and then jerked it nearer the fire. His stream of eloquence flowed on.

"Dicky-birds all right? What ho! Pint o' Karswood and there you are. How are eggs?"

"A dozen yesterday."

"I suppose that's hardly what you'd call—productive interest for the Karswood?"

"Indeed no. I've been advised to sell off those Sussex and buy a fresh stock of birds altogether."

"Good bis," he said cheerfully. "How do we accomplish this little trading? Old lamps for new. Here you are, good people. Fine plump birds, a credit to the white man's burden, as Kip has it. Good for table, or for yard, or any household employment."

"That's not quite the way."

"Excuse my ignorance. They *do* neglect our education shamefully at the 'Borstall-of-the-Hill.' I want particulars. Cig. allowable in the *salon de cuisinery*?"

"You needn't ask by this time."

"Then I'll stoke and you can talk."

I seized my opportunity and explained what I had heard that morning. He listened attentively.

"The dark, Spanish-looking hidalgo? So he's showing interest in the matter? But don't be too trusting, you know. Like father, like son, as saith one old Moore in his almanac. Perhaps Elizabeth's owner isn't any better than was Madam Waddleses's. What a tiresome name, my dear! Couldn't be done after a couple of cocktails. But to return to our Quixote. Seems queer he should advise you to shell out—I mean sell out, in this wholesale fashion. Why not ask at some of the other poulteries around?"

"I only know Mrs. Malone, and her advice isn't very trustworthy."

"Perhaps they'd know at the market. Come in and we'll trot around and make enquiries."

"The Oxford market?"

"That's the spot. Live birds; dead birds; plucked birds; singing birds. Nothing like going to the fountain head."

"I should hardly call the market *that*. Distributing, yes. A place for sales, not advice."

"Oh, wise young Solon! I bow to superior infallibility! Proceed with thy tale. What more said the lordly owner of many acres and a cow?"

"He has forty acres of grazing land and a great many cows!"

"Clever of him. Land-grabber, I expect. Came here in the good old days when Kaiser Bill stalked the earth and goose-stepped his battalions on the shores of sunny France!"

"Oh Tony!" I gasped. "You are really the most ridiculous boy."

"But good company, my dear. You looked hipped when I came on; prompt side, down stage. Five minutes—and the noted comedian had the audience in convulsions of mirth."

"It must be lovely to possess such good spirits. I suppose you're very popular among your fellow students?"

"Gadzooks, but I am! The Prince of Raggers. A bally fag sometimes; but then, one owes it to one's country. Youth, glorious youth! Keep it going. Got to have another jolly old war sometime. Another bag o' tricks being loaded up against poor old down-trodden Britain. Sometimes I think I'll have a shy at the Colonies—Australia, Canada, Hawaian Islands, Blue Lagoon, and all that. Suit me, don't you think?"

"That's hard to say. For one thing, you'd have to work."

"Yes, I suppose I should, and then such a bally fag starting. Packing your old kit bag, you know. What to leave and what to take, and everyone advising what to do, and——"

"On the whole you're better where you are."

"You think so? Really? Honest Injun? For I've a great opinion of your common sense. I always say when chaps talk of girls, 'Ah, if you only knew Sherry Gayle . . .'"

"And they probably answer, 'I'd rather get acquainted with a sherry-cobbler.'"

"How *did* you guess?" He looked at me admiringly. "Dashed clever, really. They have said that, or something

like it. Asses! If they did know you they'd alter their tune, eh what?"

"I was only thinking . . ."

"Bad for you. The corn sprouts and the birds sing and fowls lay eggs all because they never think about it. Natural course of things."

"Not the laying of eggs. At least, not always."

"We've rather boxed the compass, haven't we? Great poultry sale at Silverhatch! Bargains. Come early and bid high! No unreasonable offer refused."

"I wish you'd listen. By the way, what's the time? My kitchen clock has stopped again."

He shot out a wrist watch. "Quarter to five . . . pip, pip!"

"Time to put the kettle on. You'll stay for tea, won't you?"

"If I can help get it?"

"You shall make some toast."

For the next quarter of an hour confusion reigned. The getting out of china, the setting of the tray, the putting on of the kettle, bread cutting, toasting.

But how cheerful it all was, and how foolish we were. Then the kettle boiled over and I made the tea, and Tony carried the tray into the sitting-room while I led the way with the lamp.

Dad roused himself from an absorbed study of the geographical vagaries of the Land of Nod. He greeted Tony warmly. He was a great favourite by reason of his amusing chatter and gay spirits. We drew the curtains and stirred the fire into brilliance, and then drew round the table for the most enjoyable meal of the day. Half-way through it Tony jumped up, rushed to the door, down the passage and out. We stared in bewilderment. But he returned almost as quickly, waving a huge paper bag.

"Contributions! . . . and I had forgotten all about it."

He produced a large iced cake and popped it down on a plate in the middle of the table.

"There! Thought it might come in useful. Excuse the liberty. . . . Least said soonest mended! Miss Shirley, the deal is with you. Cut, and come again."

"Awfully kind of you," said Dad. "I haven't tasted a good piece of confectionery since we came to this benighted region."

Now, *there* was gratitude! And I had made rock cakes and scones again and again.

I cut the cake in smothered wrath. It was very rich and

very fruity. I almost hoped Dad would repent his indulgence. He went from bad to worse—conversationally.

"Have you heard of our new friend?" he asked Tony. "A surprising acquisition."

"The Spanish grandee?"

"No. A Greek—with a Roman name. It appears one must come to the most uncivilised portion of England to find an ancient aristocracy. I am introduced to-day to one Tarquinius Superbus. Descendant, I should imagine, of that race of kings who made Rome famous, or—as in the person of Sextus, seventh and last of the dynasty—infamous. You are latest from the seat of learning as administered by our great universities, so you can possibly trace origins and races of the B.C. era. Anyway, Shirley informs me of a landed proprietor, related, I believe, to our own landlord."

Here I interrupted, pitying the blank amazement of Tony's expression. "No, Dad; not landlord. This is our own property. We don't rent it."

"Ah yes—I was forgetting. But, anyway, the previous owner was a Greek by birthright, a Frenchman by matrimony, and an Englishman by naturalisation. I only saw him once. Quite a patriarchal presence. I am rather curious to see the son. But he has not honoured me with a formal call, as yet."

"I don't think he will," I said. "This is not a neighbourhood of forms and ceremonies."

"It's our friend of the chase you're talking about, isn't it?" said Tony. "I thought he was Spanish . . ."

"No, of Greek descent, but dowered with a surprising name."

"Mr. Tarquin," I interposed. "It's not so very remarkable, is it, Tony?"

"Tarquin? Oh, I *say* . . . 'How well Horatius kept the bridge.' . . . What a name to go about with in the twentieth century!"

"He can't help his name; or his nationality. He seems just as English as we are!"

"That is, I think, regrettable," said Dad, munching a huge chunk of cake. "To belong to one of the oldest and most aristocratic races in the world, and yet take pride in the adoption of a less distinguished one."

"Britannia's got a good pull back to Cæsar's time, if we come to that," interposed Tony. "So perhaps the jolly old Patriarch knew what he was about."

"Anyhow, his son fought for us in this awful war!" I exclaimed. "He bears the marks of it still."

"Ah—I was not aware of *that!* Still—Tarquin Marsyas, is it not?—sounds oddly unfamiliar amongst these bucolic surroundings!"

"I should call him Torks; o, r, k. Sounds almost Kiplingy. Oh! he's quite all right, I'd say, Mr. Gayle. Had a most pleasant introduction. Chase. Game. Home preserves. Great sport, and Aunt Elizabeth heroine of the occasion."

Dad looked bewildered. Served him right for "showing off." Tony rattled away now in good form, and painted the incidents of Elizabeth's escape with his usual aptitude of expression. From that he peradventured into our own fields of industry, and the advisability of selling useless stock.

Dad seemed to agree about the uselessness. He intimated that his expectations had been unrealised. He had pictured crates of eggs going to market; large profits; quick returns. Ready cash streaming in by postal orders. The breakfast table adorned with crackling Bradburys. As yet, even *that* table was scantily served.

No use telling him about the "off season." Fowls were expected to lay eggs as naturally as cows to give milk.

I let him talk on; and I listened, and Tony listened, and for the sake of argument agreed that a sale should take place and Silverhatch be re-stocked with a better class article.

Then Tony produced sundry poultry journals from his overcoat pockets, and we forthwith plunged into intricate details of how to select, rear, and feed the domestic hen, with further complications of "setting," incubating, securing pedigree strains and generally making a profitable business out of my present muddle.

Tony departed at last, after assisting me to wash up the tea-things. He lit his lights, and promised to take care of cross-roads and not try another record.

"Jolly fun helping you in this bis," he said cheerfully. "And I think you may trust old Torks. He looked a good sort. Anyway, he's a gentleman. My respects. To our next happy meeting. Tooral-oo. So long, old thing!"

And the Morris-Cowley slipped away into the darkness, leaving a trail of light across the road.

I went in cheered; lighter of heart. What a dear boy he was!

VI

November 5th

I UNEARTHED an old school journal to-night. It amused me to read back the incidents of those educative years and my passionate admiration of Kit as at once the most beautiful and bewildering and cleverest of school friends and my special chum.

What absurd things I had written! "*I must be free. I must work out my own destiny. I must learn to know myself. . . .*" That was the rubbish schoolgirls wrote and dreamt, and purposed to accomplish!

As if one was ever *free?* As if a thousand tiny ligaments, fine as cobwebs, strong as steel, did not eternally bind us to duties, to attachments, to obligations! As if sex-equality were anything but a jest on men's lips; a mockery on our own!

Despising the sheltered life, what had girls accomplished? Tragedy, hardship, trouble. Work, of course. That they had desired and pursued. But whether it was a new game of excitement or an outlet for discontent, who could determine?

Had the jazz saloon, or the cocaine boudoir an interest to be compared to the care of linen cupboard, or the cult of the cooking stove? Well, I was old-fashioned enough to prefer the latter and to shape my destiny independently of the marriage market. Surely there was something in womanhood sufficient for itself. Clean, sensible, useful. We weren't obliged to mate. To yield, and give ourselves to purely procreative work in order that our hearts might be broken as those 1914 mother-hearts had been broken by useless sacrifice to a false ideal?

I closed the book.

Pictures floated before my mind. Fat merry boys in the nursery. Youth home for the holidays. The hopes, fears, expectations of a start in life, and then—that crack of Doom!

How our best and bravest and youngest had all gone down before it, or come home as mere blighted survivors of a merciless fate. What a world of desolation and misery faced the dawn of 1918! How changed was youth that had hardly known one of youth's privileges. How saddened was maturity. How broken-up was old age.

I had closed my journal on a world acclaiming Peace at any price, so only it was a cessation of war's murderous insatiability. I read it over to-night with wonder and disturbance.

Dad and I were part of the shipwreck. We too had fallen on evil days. But I meant to stick to him and to my work and trust to Providence for results. I was not romantic. I was not very accomplished. Certainly I was not beautiful, judged by Kit's standard. But what mattered? I had health, strength, youth, courage and keen determination. Out of such ingredients I must surely make something of life. "Gather up the fragments that remained" and fill at least one basketful.

The scribbling habit had pursued me at intervals. I would take it up again along with my new interests.

It was certainly a change after luxuries and servants, and dainty food and endless pocket-money to have to look at every sixpence, and work *as* a servant instead of ruling as a mistress. But inasmuch as the work called up energy and applauded usefulness, I saw no reason to complain.

I meant to make a success of my little poultry farm. It ought to be self-supporting in a year's time. And I felt I should like the life and the interests, and the responsibilities. It meant something to do. I determined to do it.

. . . I have put away my old journal with a sort of pitying contempt for the girl who wrote in it that she "must be free," that she must "work out her own destiny." Above all, that she must *learn to know herself!*

Should I ever be able to do that? Does one ever accomplish self-knowledge? Is one able to be perfectly honest with one's own soul, and all it stands for?

I could not answer these questions. I felt I could only go on with the day's tasks and the day's routine. I must live simply; perhaps roughly. I must renounce many of the delights of youth; feminine youth. Yet I found myself believing that somehow, in some rare moment, I might clutch the skirts of passing happiness.

The arrival of a purchaser for my stock synchronises with this fresh entry.

The gentleman cycled over in the company of "Mr. Torks," as I called him to myself. He inspected the Sussex; made disparaging remarks; finally offered to buy 150 of them for £20.

My friend interposed. There were brisk arguments. The jargon of breeders and experts bewildered me. So did the

names of an offered selection to take the place of my present stock.

"Torks" drew me aside and said gently, "If you would trust me? I'll do the very best, I promise you. He's buying these for table use and you could have good layers and promising sitters in place of them."

So I said mournfully, "Do as you please . . . only not Mrs. Waddles and Uncle Timothy, over there . . . sitting and taking counsel together."

"I understand."

Then came hours of confusion. To get the birds; to drive them into capturable regions meant arduous work, and a frightful discord of complaints.

Mrs. Malone came out to help and so did Pat, grinning from ear to ear with delight.

At last the discarded ones were caught and penned and placed in a market cart and I received a cheque, and the promise of sundry white Wyandottes and Black Leghorns, and eight months-old pullets, all to be forwarded by the next week.

"I feel I ought to thank you," I said to "Superbus," standing slim and straight and workmanlike beside his bicycle. "You've wasted a whole morning."

"It's the least I can do to atone."

His voice was a little ungracious. His eyes turned from empty spaces to the unpleasant hen houses.

"*These* next," he said, and waved a peremptory hand. "I'll send over one of my men. I can easily spare one now. There's little doing on the farm."

"But—" I began.

He sprang on to his machine. "No, no; I must do it! You must let me. Once the place is in going order I promise not to trouble you any more."

Trouble me! That was one way of putting it. He had advised and assisted and been so helpful, and still would help, and he called it "troubling me"!

I watched him cycling away, making light of the rough, uneven lane that shortened the distance to the village.

All around me were poultry runs stretching on every side. Each with its bungalow residence. Some very small and rustic, others florid with brick and tiles. Tarred fences and green patches of grass marked efforts at gardens. But there were few signs of flowers, or even shrubberies. Low grounds, flat and far-reaching and broken only by stretches of wire netting and

long rows of wooden hen-houses represented the sole industry of the village. Here and there the upturned naked soil showed stones and roots and every unfertile sign. Yet one knew potential fruitfulness might work beneath that surface. I remembered those grazing lands and meadows, and great empty fields which marked the old Manor acres.

Wild and rough as all this landscape looked, there would come the beauty of spring to lighten it, and the secrets of spring to conquer it. The green crests of the hills would smile with sunshine and fair promise, and with that promise I hoped for better things. I saw my barren "run" as a thing of beauty; of picturesque white birds and gay young cockerels. I had some dear homely brown Buffs still left to me and must confess to a sneaking tenderness for their presence. I forgot present desolation; my emptied hen-houses. "Nature is wonderful," I said to myself and, reflecting on her wonders, returned to domestic duties.

The afternoon would be fine. I should have leisure for a walk. I wanted to explore our neighbourhood more thoroughly. I had heard of picturesque villages; had seen quaint old churches as Tony whizzed me by. But with Tony anything like leisurely exploration was impossible. I suggested a walk to Dad.

"You ought to take more exercise. You'll get fat."

"I've had an idea," he said triumphantly. "I'll write a simple explanatory history of this neighbourhood and its surroundings. I can compile it from old records . . . old engravings. There must be a library; possibly at Bampton. I wish you would make enquiries. Old books, the older the better. Legends and places and scenes that could be incorporated into a little chatty guide. Excellent occupation for these winter months, and money in it, I'm sure. The prescribed form of guide-book is always unsatisfactory. Seems to miss just the one place, the one description, the one bit of information that the reader desires. I've felt that myself. I shall make an effort to remedy it—for others."

"Well, come along with me and explore. You can easily walk to Bampton. We could catch the bus back here."

He shook his head. He was really incorrigibly lazy.

"No, my child. I want to work out my scheme . . . sort of scenariorise it. You understand the information I need?"

"I understand there is the Bodleian Library at Oxford," I said petulantly.

"You forget I was at Balliol," he rebuked.

"But, as far as I can ascertain, the Oxford student is the last sort of visitor to that remarkable place!"

"I—was an exception then. I loved it . . . haunted it. The recollection of its literary treasures is with me still. Unfortunately, they are no sort of help in the matter that now concerns me."

With a recollection of other literary efforts, memoirs, anthologies, studies of the Renaissance, hopefully commenced, abandoned midway, I felt little enthusiasm for the new project. No doubt it would be started, talked about, eulogised for a time. Then I should hear no more of it. However, I knew arguments were hopeless at such times. If he felt he must write a guide-book, well, he would write it, or attempt to write it. I knew the sort of information he would need. I had burrowed into old book shops and secured second-hand treasures often. Of course, there was no knowing what of interest or tradition might be scattered far and wide over this quaint district.

"I think I must get a bicycle," I said to him. "If I am to do any exploring I'll need one. Not only to save time, but for local knowledge."

"Yes," he agreed. "Hire one, or buy one in Oxford. I expect your market profits will run to that."

My market profits!

I wonder the roof did not fall in at that boastful utterance.

Hours ago I wandered forth. Now I sit quietly by the kitchen fire, having given up the sitting-room table to Dad, and a collection of fossilised literature picked up at an old store in Bampton. The queerest stuff. Along with it some ancient photographs of churches and market crosses, done on postcards for tourist interests.

I had first stopped at Brize Norton, a good-sized village of whose history I was profoundly ignorant. It possessed a most curious old church. I was shown over it by an elderly sexton who drew my special attention to the tomb and effigy of one Sir John Daubyne, represented in costume of Edward III. period.

"Why he's buried here none o' us do rightly know, for the family lived at Bampton, so they say."

However, there was the tomb and there was the inscription. I dutifully copied it for Dad's benefit, as I did the curious bit

of information that from 1663 to 1858 there had only been four vicars of the church. It had then fallen into decay, and been the subject of lamentable neglect and much scandal arising therefrom. However, the edifice had been restored into decency, so my informant explained. He also pointed out that the old house at Lower Haddon would be on my way to Bampton. There was a tradition attending it. A Roman Catholic plot had there been hatched in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and some noted revolutionist had passed his last hours of liberty under its roof.

And thus, furnished with direction and information, I reached Bampton. "Treetown" is the signification of its name. It stands in a wooded valley still, despite the changes of time and trade which will soon cease to respect common land or its rights.

I found my way to the town, as they called it, by direction of the church spire. I had not time to go in. I relegated that pleasure to a future day. I merely asked a few questions of an old inhabitant, and learnt that the famous horse-fair was no longer held, and that its industry of tanning and leather-making was also a thing of the past. But tradition lent it beauty. The noble old church, standing on ground ancient as the Saxon kings who ruled the land, the clean little streets, the dear old-fashioned inn, the grammar school (dated 1637) purposeless, alas! for many years. The quaint shops, the Gate House with its glorious old stone work—all these were full of interest. I picked up plenty of information over a cup of tea at the grocer's shop, and it was there I procured the queer postcards, and ancient engravings. I secured all on reasonable terms for Dad's benefit.

I had to hurry back as the afternoon was closing in, and I had some miles to trudge. I passed the ghost-haunted cross roads with a little shudder. The legend I had heard seemed so possible to verify.

In old days they buried malefactors there, and one, possibly wrongfully accused, could not rest in his unsanctified grave. So he took to haunting the place and frightening respectable people, so that few liked to venture there after dark!

He did not appear to me, I am glad to say, though I confess (here) to a hurried pace and a shiver of cowardice. The name was unpleasant as the legend, "*Cow Leas Corner.*" I sped along the road to Clanditch, which was the designation of my own village, meeting no one save a plodding labourer or two,

and resolved in my own mind to secure a bicycle at once, even on hire.

And now, having committed myself and my day's records to this safe confidant, I shall put it away, unless anything new transpires.

Later. P.S.—Odd that Dad and I should be seized with the same idea. "*Cacoethes scribendi!*" I wondered how the guide-book was getting on as I raked out the fire, and pushed back my chair.

I saw to security of bolts and locks, and passed on to the sitting-room.

The table was still littered with papers, pens, note-books. Dad glanced up at my entrance.

"Bed-time? Really! Time has flown for me. I think I shall make something of this idea, Shirley. I've sketched out my preface. . . . My idea is to take my reader by the hand, so to say, and conduct him along by meadow, road, and byway to all sorts of picturesque interests, chatting, as we go, of past incidents; painting scenic descriptions in vivid words. I shall thrill his ear with legend and tradition. I can invent them to suit the situation," he added cheerfully. "People love that sort of thing."

"Even if it's not true?" said I.

"My dear child, guide-books, historians, and house agents have no use for truth!"

November 16th

The weather has improved. My spirits rose to the improvement. The drudgery of life seemed less onerous under sunshine.

Once again my "hen run" displayed its ostensible purpose. The new fowls had arrived. Beautiful white Wyandottes and fussy Leghorns now strutted to and fro between their wired enclosures; scratched and cackled and clamoured for food, and thank goodness!—*began to lay.*

The fifty or so of my old stock were also showing signs of improvement. Uncle Timothy and Mrs. Waddles looked on gloomily, but were always ready for their meals and full of interest in my doings. "Poultry and sentiment," they seemed to say. "How foolish!"

Greatly elated, I conducted Tony to-day to what he called the "White Pleasaunce." The promised farm hand and Ganders were still at work on the new houses. I was delighted

with their appearance, and also pleased to hear that the old ones possessed possibilities, if only cleaned up and repaired.

"Noble sight!" declaimed Tony. "Here we have England at its best. Small outlay, large profits. Every hen will lay its egg, and every egg will mean money. (Fourpence each, my dear, at market to-day!) No golf balls allowed."

"Golf balls?"

He produced a few journals from his pocket. "Light literature for long evenings. What *these* don't teach you of poultry farming may be left to imagination. See, old thing, pictures; the full-feathered clucker as she is at home! And *you* have her by the score . . . good egg; I mean good bis. Did Superbus do the trick?"

"Yes," I said. "He found me a purchaser, and he also got these new birds. They *are* beauties, Tony."

"Topping! Perfect advert. of profits for the fiscal year. Hundred hens. Each hen to hatch out a dozen chicks. They grow and begin to lay and—well, there you are! A millionaire in no time."

"If the poultry journals taught you all that," I said, "they beat our best fiction writers. You seem to forget attendant expenses. Food, houses, coops; and the risks—illness, moulting, effects of weather; poor sittings."

"I'll send you a few dozen incubators. I'm taking quite an interest in this business. We'll go into partnership if you like. Amuse me in the 'off season.' What a young flapper called 'the holidays.' . . . Holidays—ye gods! Term, and turn about, and show your full ignorance of academical matters and the distinctive features of our venerable colleges. I made a speech last night at our political meeting. Quite a success. They'd have encored it if permitted."

"I'm not surprised, but if you *can* be serious for two minutes please get into your head that I am not going to have incubators. They're a frightful trouble and anxiety. Besides, they seem so—so unnatural. I want my own birds, my own broods, and to rear my own chickens."

"But the partnership goes!" he exclaimed. "Deeds will be drawn up to date and forwarded by our Mr. Straightlace, of Foolscap, Redtape and Co. Signed, sealed and delivered. 'I give this my word and deed.' Or is that only for shares? Well, I'm going shares, so possibly it amounts to the same thing. To begin with, I'm paying half for this addition to our stock, and I'll be content with three per cent. as a start in profits.

I can be of immense benefit. Cart up the good old Karswood! Take the eggs to market. All I bar is keeping the books. No head for figures, but in other ways—brilliant! You take me? Yes. I see it in your eye."

"Most ridiculous boy! Will you be quiet a moment?"

"Business, my lass, waits for no man, or woman either. Well, well, we have our stock. We will now survey our new accommodators. As long as the English breakfast reigns in the land so long will there be demands for eggs, and still eggs. Boiled, fried, poached, scrambled, curried, omeletted, devilled! Eggs all along the way. Every blighter I meet on my pathway of life is an egg-eater. There, my girl, you have our business in a nutshell. Which reminds me—I hope you can give me a bit of food as I want to take you back to Oxford with me. I was told of a bicycle. I know just the place. We'll go and select one—Raleigh, or is it Enfield you prefer? Once aboard the emporium and the bike is yours! Credit quite possible on my note-of-hand, if cash inconvenient."

"You seem particularly brilliant to-day," I got in at last. "Who told you about the bicycle?"

"The dear old student in our parlour yonder. I blew in before I came thither—to collect news."

"Was he writing?"

"I shouldn't describe it as that. Meditative—that seems the position. The table covered with papers *and* books. Quite the literary atmosphere.

"Did he tell you his new idea?"

"Our 'chatty guide' to road and valley? Yes. Jolly good notion! I expect he'll make it a success. I seem to have dropped into genius. What?"

"I wish you would drop into sense!" I exclaimed. "Have you talked yourself out yet?"

He regarded me reproachfully. "Dear Miss Sherry, otherwise Gayle, Garth and Co, Limited, I've meant every word. My people are always buzzing at me to *do* something; to make up my mind for a career. Well, I'll start one here and now, as the Yanks say. I've a lot of loose cash lying about, and I want to have some interest (that's *not* a joke) in life."

"If a university career doesn't provide *that* I'm sorry for you," I said.

"Oh, it does, it does! But, all the same, I'm going in for utility," he persisted. "I shall look up Superbus, and find out the supply market, and get him to order a few dozen Rhodes in

my name. A thank-offering for the scholarship, and the dear lads who come to us from *veldt* and *kopje!* So that's all settled."

He regarded the white crowd. . . . "I think some of these now belong to me. Have you counted them?"

"No; that's a very difficult matter. Roughly, I should say one hundred and fifty."

"Well, the odd fifty are mine. A receipt to that effect will oblige. But you must do all the feeding and housing, *et cet.* Hence my modest three per cent. Next year we'll have another hundred, and so on; enlarging our boundaries along with our stock. Everything up-to-date, and of the best. Oh! mother *will* be pleased when she hears of her boy's resourcefulness! You'll win her eternal gratitude. Keeping me on the home farm and all that; away from evil examples and the vengeance of proctors, otherwise bull dogs, which reminds me I've got a dog for you. It's quite time you had one. Keep watch and frighten off burglars. I'll introduce him this afternoon, after we've seen the bike. He likes a cup of tea."

"A dog!" . . . I gasped.

"Don't you like dogs?"

"I love them. But won't he chase the chickens, and——"

"Oh no. He's trained. Quite a sport, I assure you. Pedigree and all that. Understands three languages."

"What sort of dog?" I asked.

"Most uncommon. Long-haired blue wolf hound. Three hands high. Most intelligent. Comes from Russia."

"Tony!"

"Yes; I thought you'd be pleased. And so affectionate," Well, I gave it up. He was more than ever impossible, lovable, ridiculous. What could one do?

VII

Same Evening

THE "run" to Oxford this afternoon was speedily accomplished. Tony seemed to have secured his little car on some convenient instalment principle. At all events, he spoke of it possessively.

There are bicycle shops in the "Broad," as well as in less

important streets. I was piloted into two or three before I came across the special machine I wanted. The price was rather more than I could afford, but with Tony's references and credentials I got off on an easy instalment scale, and was told I could take possession at once. I was too much out of practice to peradventure twenty or more miles as a trial trip, so the shop people promised to send it next day. This matter accomplished, we had tea somewhere near the Corn Market. A tea-shop where sundry undergrads were partaking of strong "brews" and masses of sticky confectionery.

"The sweet tooth of youth still loves digestive hazards," murmured Tony, after giving our order for toasted scones and what he termed "good old *sow*chang."

There was no one from his own college present. A few of what he called "scholarships." Dark, weird youths. Indian, Japanese, S. African. Oddly out of place in an English tea-shop. Also some shy-looking "freshers," and a couple of divinity students, as self-conscious as their collars demanded. My sex was but scantily represented, which perhaps accounted for the notice our table attracted. I am afraid we were somewhat frivolous. Tony being in conspicuously good spirits and I—with a mind relieved of many troubles—(temporarily) feeling disinclined to suppress him.

After the scones we had a variety of fancy cakes, and then suddenly I remembered the dog.

"What about that wolf hound? And how am I to get him to Silverhatch?"

"I purpose his sharing our chariot for the return journey."

"But, Tony," I expostulated, "you are never going to make the journey to and fro *again?* Four times in one day!"

"And if 'twere forty, fair maid, what then?—seeing my time is my own, and my good steed waits on my will."

"Your good steed wastes a good amount of petrol."

"Forsooth, and forsoath! What matter? Youth must be lived. Best of one's ability! 'Use well the passing hour, *et cet.*' Dear old peach, you *do* look well to-day. Methinks fowl life becomes thy fairness; no joke intended. Hast remarked how spontaneous is my wit? Tap always on."

"But the dog?" I persisted. "Where has he been all this time?"

"As a matter of fact, in my rooms. We conveyed him there to await inspection."

"I am to go to *your rooms?*"

"Does maiden prudery forbid? Gadzooks! have I not as high an opinion of its honour as my own? And have I not provided a chaperon of first quality? Class A. None other than my Jacobean archdeacon. Irreproachable as myself!"

"Oh, my dear boy, *do* give over and listen!"

"We obey." He took out a cigarette case, offered me one, which I refused, and then lit one for himself.

"Attention! Eyes left. G-rr-rr-! Now, what is it?"

"Well, in the first place, what do you *do* at college? Learn anything or just fool about?"

"*Learn* anything? But of course! I am learning all the time. Have I not thrown immaturity aside to study life on my own in yonder grey halls of wisdom? Fate forbade me indoor accommodation, yet perchance I secure more of liberty in my humble lodgment than would have been accorded under the *ægis* of a gateway—fourteenth-century. Learn? Do I not attend hall and chapel in the intervals of strenuous 'tubs' (sporting for boats, old thing; not ablutions)? Do I not grind at classics? True, I find them a bit out of date, but the laws of Medes and Parthians (don't think that's right, but 'twill serve) are as nothing to the stolid fogeydom of the 'varsity. Then I'm tremendously keen on literature. Dramatic literature. That, of course, necessitates a study of Thespis on its—or is it her?—own grounds. Thus one meets adventure by seizing 'skirts of happy chance.' The foolish of us avoid them—skirts, I mean. The wise live and reflect on what 'might have been' save for sacrifices to the Bona Dea of Propriety!"

He had dropped into a mock serious voice and attitude as the divinity students went by. One of them gave him a sharp glance, which he met with supreme innocence.

"Does he know you?" I asked, also in lowered tones.

"He probably heard my oration at the Hall of Debate, and envies my gifts. It's curious that the worst speakers we have belong to the throaty chorus of Brasenose!"

I glanced anxiously at a clock.

"Tony, I ought to be getting back!"

"Won't Mother Malone feed the babes and put them to bed?"

"I left everything ready for her. But I'm so afraid that boy may be up to his tricks. I don't half like him."

"Well, old thing, I've thoroughly enjoyed your charming company, and trust not the last occasion . . . *et cet., et cet.* . . . Here, Miss Phœbe, our little reckoning, if you please!"

A fair-haired, pert young damsel drew up at the table, and proceeded to consummate our feast in figures.

"Cakes?" she questioned.

"My sister had three, I think. I—merely sampled one, *en passant*."

The girl surveyed the empty dish and threw him a look of disdain. Possibly she was too used to students' chaff to pay special heed to any fresh samples of it.

She tore off the sheet of paper and presented it. Tony disbursed sundry coins and closed her hand upon their acceptance.

"And may Heaven bless you—" he said fervently—"for a cup of tea that had some taste in it! Of comestibles I take little heed, but for *sow*chang I have a weakness!"

The girl giggled suddenly.

"You are a queer chap. . . . Seen you before, you know."

"And will have that pleasure again," said Tony genially. "Bear that document to the receipt of custom and keep the change. I would it were more, but a sister comes expensive, as perhaps you know?"

"Sis-ter? . . . Oh—I know all about *that!*"

Still giggling, she went off to the cash desk. Tony helped me into my warm coat and we departed in search of the wolf hound.

I am fond of animals of all sorts and descriptions, horses and dogs in especial. Nor am I faddy as to breeds and pedigrees. I love the animal for his own sake. Consequently, when a large iron-grey body, a long pointed head, and two melancholy brown eyes were presented as significant of Boris, I merely accepted them, and him.

He was not exactly beautiful. I doubt even if he were the pedigree-bred much-vaunted champion accepted on trust by Tony. But he was lovable, and gentle, and looked intelligent.

He offered me a paw with due solemnity. He walked to the door and essayed to open it at Tony's command. He was evidently well trained, but I had no guarantee how he would behave on a poultry farm.

"You like him, eh?" said Tony.

"I do. There's something very fine about his head, and his manners are excellent."

"Well, that's all right. A friend of mine, going abroad,

wanted a home for him. I'd have taken him myself, but he couldn't have a place to run about."

"Do you think he'll chase the fowls?" I asked anxiously.

"You can keep them in their own enclosures, and he can roam the home park as seemeth good."

"He ought to have a kennel," I said.

"He must. But I'd give him a free hand at night—especially when pay day arrives. There's some queer characters around about your district. They know when money is due. More than one robbery has taken place. I hope you bank your cash?"

"I haven't any yet to bank. Dad has a small account at Lloyd's Oxford branch, for convenience. But I haven't been able to supplement the credit."

"But you will. Oh! of course you will. Prosperity awaits us. Are we downhearted? No! . . . Intelligence wins the day and captures the poultry market. 'If you can't afford a Christmas turkey, what's wrong with a capon from the noted Silverhatch Poultry Farm!' . . . That's the sort of ad. to put in next month. I'm getting quite professional. I see you looking at my digs. What think you?"

"The rooms look very comfortable, and very like you," I said. "Do you study here or at your college?"

"Well—both," he said audaciously. "I'm rather keen on taking a first—for the sports this year!"

I gave it up, and asked no more.

We conveyed Boris home with some difficulty, as he manifested a desire for a seat to himself from which to view the landscape. But, finally, he was coaxed to good behaviour and arrived at his future home in time to arrange accommodation for the night.

It developed into a large empty packing-case, littered with straw. We placed it in the outhouse. Tony attached a long piece of rope to his collar so that he had a certain amount of exercise ground.

"Just for to-night, my faithful hound," he explained. "You must get used to the place and guard its helpless owners. As you stand there and the moonlight silvers the plain, you can imagine you are on your own wild steppes, and that the baying wolf lurks in yonder forest!"

He turned to me. "There, old thing! Rather a neat piece of work, I call it. 'A plate of food, a water bowl, and thou—' and sure, no dog could ask for more, bow-wow!"

"I wonder what Dad will say?" I remarked.

For our entrance had been by the back path, and Boris had not betrayed his advent by so much as a bark.

"From personal experience of our scholarly host I should say he would passively accept such a trustworthy guardian. His slumbers henceforth will be deepened by security. . . . Where the dickens are you off to now?"

For I was lifting a lantern for my nightly round, after so long an absence.

"To see that the birds are all right, of course."

"My holy aunt! Do you pay nightly as well as daily visits to the feeding pens?"

"This visit is to their dormitories, and to see that no wanderers have been left in the outlying places."

"I'll come, too."

So off we went, and inspected the various houses, and found our feathered flock safely perched and lodged for the night. Not a straggler anywhere.

"Mrs. Malone has done her duty," I said. "Unless it happened to be Ganders. Isn't it a wonderful sight? Row upon row, one above the other."

"A touching spectacle," said my impossible "partner," affecting to wipe a tear. "The evening meal; the evening hymn; the sleep of innocence, and futile intentions!"

As I closed the door of the last house and turned away I stumbled against a wooden case left lying in the corner. I heard a queer "squawk," a flutter, and there, sitting within and eyeing me with malicious glee, was Mrs. Waddles.

"Gracious, old woman! What are you doing here?"

I tried to eject her, but she clung desperately to her box.

"What is she doing?" asked Tony, and lifted her unceremoniously.

I peered within, and there nestled in the straw were two small white eggs. Tony peered at them.

"Perhaps she's incubating?"

"Or broody?" I hazarded. "Mrs. Malone says they do go like that, and will sit on anything."

"Well, that's all right! You'll have some little Waddles's. . . . Here, look out, I say!"

For his hand had received a sudden vicious peck. In the beam of the lantern light a cold gleaming eye gave challenge. He dropped her hastily.

"Sorry, old thing! No harm meant. Unacquainted with etiquette of interesting conditions. I apologise."

She gave a sort of "hiss" and relapsed into her straw bedding.

"Better leave her to her own devices," advised Tony. "Nature, you know. Wonderful how it teaches her sex to do what's expected."

"But this is the wrong time for sitting. I'm sure it is. The—the poultry book said—*January* or *February* for winter layers."

"Dear old thing, wasn't nature here before poultry books, or poultry farms, or even good old Karswood! . . . There, old lady, we're going. Don't put yourself out any more. She won't catch cold, will she?" he asked anxiously.

I thought not. The nights were still mild, and I scorned Tony's suggestion of an umbrella as temporary roofing. We left the enterprising lady to herself, and went within. I had supper to prepare and Tony his return journey to make before dinner time.

So we parted, after a brief word to Dad, who was placidly smoking by the fire and enjoying Tom Webster's cartoons in the *Daily Mail*. (That indispensable journal never reached us till mid-day.) He looked up at our entrance, and Tony tried to explain a bicycle and a watch dog and a broody hen in as few words as time permitted.

"That boy comes here very often." Thus my parent, at a later period of this eventful evening. "I wonder why?"

"You need not picture incipient romance," I told him. "He has merely developed a taste for 'poultry farming,' and we've gone into partnership."

"He—he going into this business? Impossible!"

"I think it's just a freak. But all the same, it will be great help."

I explained about the new stock; the necessity of paying cash for food, and the very limited supply—as yet—of eggs.

He listened, with his most aggravating air of martyrdom. I felt inclined to hint that he merely assisted in the industry as a breakfast consideration. But I refrained. After all, it was his money I had risked, and was still risking. He might well ask to what end or purpose it was being used?

"Well, I hope the end of the year won't find us in the workhouse!" he said cheerfully.

I put aside the full interpretation of that ominous suggestion.

"Why should it? Other people in the neighbourhood seem to do well, and make a living out of their birds, and eggs, and chickens. We must have a little time to try our hand. 'Rome wasn't—' I needn't conclude."

"No. I have a little erudition, I trust. 'Gayle and Garth,' poultry farmers," he added ruminatingly. "I suppose you'll be figuring in the shows and taking prizes if all goes well?"

"A moment ago you suggested the workhouse?"

"Merely irony, my child. A playful way of countenancing risks! Young Garth *has* means, I believe?"

"He seems fairly well off."

"Well, well, it is better he should put money into a useful industry than into the pockets of college sharks."

A queer sort of day, and yet it has held interest. I sat down and wrote all about it in my friendly journal. A good test of memory, if nothing else!

P.S.—The literature connected with poultry-farming is a little confusing to the tyro in its art, or artifices.

It all sounded so easy and so prosperous. One was told of so many aids and foods and methods that it seemed impossible to make mistakes. On the other hand, one read of so many mistakes possible to make that the balance swung fairly even. At least, for a novice like myself. I read of individual hens laying 300 eggs a year, and carrying on this activity to quite a ripe age! I read of breeds and prizes. Of every sort of poultry house and poultry food. Of methods of rearing chicks—natural and artificial. And of clubs and shows, and champions and gold medals until the fields of possibility widened into a wild prosperity. Eggs, indeed, were a British necessity. The staple adjunct of breakfast table and kitchen. One could not picture an eggless larder, any more than an eggless omelette. Here was a standard industry waiting on a standard market, and, or so I hoped, standard prices.

I must just persevere. Work hard and hope for the best. I did not like Dad's remark about the workhouse . . . and I had been feeding him so well!

VIII

From My Journal

I WAS up betimes this morning, full of anxiety respecting Mrs. Waddles, and eager for Mrs. Malone's advice on the matter. She was generally up and about by six o'clock. So I called to her over our dividing hedge and asked her to come and look at my first sitter.

She did so. Then she gave it as her opinion that, having begun, she might as well go on, and offered me a spare half-dozen of " speshuls " to put under her.

" They'll be hatched before Christmas, but you must put her in a house by herself. One o' thim little ould ones over there, as you don't need for the roosters."

" Will the weather affect her ? " I asked anxiously. " The poultry book speaks of special lamps and heaters."

" If you'd be believin' all thim books say, ye'd niver rear a dacint bird ! 'Tis all for machinery and tricks they'd be. Interferin' wid nature. You lave the ould hin to herself and 'tis the fine brood ye ll see. Wait till I m gettin' that sittin' I have beyant, and we'll lift her up and give her some breakfast and back she'll go. Ye must be bringin' her food to her, you know ; maybe she'll get up, and maybe she won't. The eggs mustn't git cold."

" Ah—that's why the poultry book suggests heaters ! "

Mrs. Malone regarded me doubtfully. " If 'twas in me own home I was, I'd have her in the kitchen. Sure there's many I reared that way. Quite contint ; the ould bird sittin' patient in her corner, and the cock, he'd walk in to take her place so that she might have her feed and a rest. As sinsible as Christians they was, and divil a bit o' trouble they'd give."

" Perhaps Irish fowls are different ? " I said, picturing Mrs. Waddles and Uncle Timothy doing " turn and turn about " on this unexpected sitting.

" Maybe that's how it is. But let's put her aside now, for thim others will disturb her. It's quare the way they gits."

She lifted the box selected by Mrs. Waddles for family purposes, and we placed it in a small disused shed. I provided the good lady with breakfast, which she declined until suddenly Uncle Timothy appeared on the scene. Then, to my unutterable amazement, she rose from the nest and *he took her place.*

" There, wasn't I right ? " exclaimed Mrs. Malone. " I'l

hurry in now and fetch that other clutch, and we'll slip them under the ould gintleman and she'll be none the wiser. It's a quare thing, Miss Shirley, but there's no stupider feathered craytures in this wurrld than hins. The only bit o' sinse they show is whin the young ones is out."

So she departed to prove one phase of this stupidity by proving also Mrs. Waddles' ignorance of the multiplication table!

Same Night

As a first and novel experience I related all this to Dad, over fried rashers and hot coffee. He was highly amused. I'm not sure that he won't incorporate the incident in his chatty guide-book. Conducting the tourist past a farm yard might be hintful. Then, the anecdote would follow. I left it at that.

I had a busy day before me, and dinner to provide. Boiled chicken and parsley sauce, and apple dumplings. Things Dad loved, but whose preparation, taken in conjunction with house work and washing up, and mid-day feed for the poultry meant incessant occupation.

In the midst of it my bicycle arrived, and Boris, for the first time, gave audible proof of his presence. He barked violently at the young man who brought it, so much so that Dad came out to see what was the matter. Boris took an instant fancy to him, and offered his paw in friendly fashion. When the obnoxious youth had departed, Dad declared it was a shame to keep such an animal tied up. He ought to have "the run of the place."

So he untied him and showed him the house. The animal sniffed and scented everything, and then came to me in the kitchen, attracted, no doubt, by savoury odours.

It struck me then that he would require a great deal of nourishment. He was large and lean, and evidently possessed an appetite. It would be Friday before the butcher came round. This was Wednesday. I wondered how I was to get a supply for him. He looked as if one of our small joints would only serve him for a single meal. At that particular moment the back door was pushed open and the head of Pat proclaimed his advent. He was mouthing something about "clane out that end hin-house" when his eye fell on the dog. Possibly Boris recognised a challenge of fear, or else the half-witted youth aroused instant animosity. In any case the dog made a plunge at the door. Pat gave a yell and took to his

heels. Boris dashed after him, and I after Boris. From that moment. . . .

After a fit of helpless mirth and the lapse of many hours I am trying to describe that scene, but words can never sound so funny as reality.

Pat, quite losing his head, made for the enclosure. Before he could shut the gate Boris was in also. The Wyandottes and Leghorns and Sussex were already in possession. A noble show. Boris, after an instant's survey, dashed into the middle of them, barking a loud greeting. Whether they misunderstood his language, or resented his presence, I cannot say. I only know that there was an instant uproar. A whirl and swirl of wings, a hideous noise, and the whole flock started running to the extreme limits of the enclosure. Boris, evidently thinking it a new game, dashed after them in wild pursuit. The birds, after a display of speed I had never imagined possible, tried flight as well. Some succeeded in topping the wire netting. Most of them failed. In vain I called to Boris. I was a novelty as yet in ownership, and he paid no attention. I became conscious of clouds of feathers, racing feet, hideous raucous "squawks." Confusion that might well have excused strong language.

Suddenly there sounded on the air a loud long whistle.

Boris, in an instant, stopped dead, stared around, and then charged back and leaped the gate, and stood as if waiting. I summoned fortitude and called to the fowls and finally succeeded in quieting the uproar, and shutting them safely into their familiar scratching ground.

Then I turned to see what had happened to Boris.

The gate was closed. Pat had disappeared, and my "wolf hound" showed himself to my astonished gaze lying lamb-like at the feet of Tarquin Superbus!

From whence *he* had sprung, or what spell lay in his whistle, I could not imagine!

In fact, I was too breathless and hot and dusty to do more than gasp a sort of greeting. He opened the gate for me and I came through.

"Did you see? . . . What a business, wasn't it? All the fault of this dog. He was given to me yesterday, but I only agreed to keep him if he was guaranteed not to chase fowls!"

"But did you make him understand that?"

He had his hand on the head of the dog, who was looking up

at him with those great melting brown eyes that made one feel one could forgive anything.

"Well, no. It was all so sudden."

I laughed hysterically.

"One moment he was there, in the kitchen, and the next——"

I stopped. I remembered Pat as first cause of the trouble and looked round to see if he was visible.

"That boy next door!" I gasped. "He came. Boris didn't seem to like him. He dashed off and through the poultry run. The result—I suppose you saw?" I added—"But the chase stopped when you whistled. I suppose it was—you?"

"Yes. Boris knew that whistle. He once belonged to me. I had him to train. I often train dogs. It used to be horses, but since my wound—"

"Oh——" I burst in—"how very strange! I mean, his having belonged to *you*. I heard his owner had gone abroad."

"I was not his owner. I had him to train, and then returned him. But a dog never forgets."

He patted the beautiful upraised head. There was something in his face I had never seen. A tenderness, a regret.

"I am thankful you stopped the chase," I said at last. "The question now is how to teach him that a poultry yard is not a grouse moor."

"It will not be difficult. I can soon do that if you will give me permission."

"But, do you know—"

I hesitated. Then burst forth in a tumult of excited words. "Do you know, Mr. Tarquin, you are for ever doing things here for me! For us, I mean. I really cannot encroach upon your time any further. There are those nice new houses, and the exchanged birds, and now—this dog!"

"Yes," he said; "and why not?"

"I mean I owe it all to you. I am very, very grateful. All the same, I don't like to seem so—well, so dependant."

"The feeling does you credit, Miss Gayle. but I assure you my time is not so fully occupied that I can't spare a few hours in the service of my neighbours. To tell you the truth, I feel an interest in this place. I should like to see it a success. My father always says I have the soul of a farmer and can only look at soil as the hidden promise of harvests. Be that as it may, I have done a good deal for my own farm, and it seemed a very hopeless undertaking when I took it over. There—

that's my explanation. I admired your pluck in starting this single-handed. I'm sure you don't realise what a hard job it is. Most people think poultry keeping a sort of joke. It's nothing of the kind. It wants brains and great patience and untiring industry. You must let me help you; at least, with advice if nothing else."

"I am greatly in your debt already . . . ." I faltered, and then, interrupted by a gesture, I burst suddenly into the recital of Mrs. Waddles.

He listened quite gravely. "Not so unusual as you seem to think. Of course, you can check her if you wish. Not all 'broody' hens are allowed to sit."

"But she's begun, and Mrs. Malone has put half a dozen eggs in the nest, besides her own two."

"Oh well, I should leave her. Where have you set the nest?"

"She selected it herself. An old wooden box with some loose hay in it. We, Mrs. Malone and I, have put it into that house there. She is quite by herself." Then I laughed, remembering Uncle Timothy's visit.

I tried to explain. He seemed equally amused.

"I've seen that done before."

"It seems quite an Irish custom, according to Mrs. Malone. Perhaps there's a Hibernian strain in Uncle Timothy. Look—there he is, standing on guard outside the house."

He looked at the solitary sentry, and then at me, and our eyes met and suddenly we both laughed. After that our acquaintanceship halted for no formalities. I frankly accepted his advice and his proffered aid. I was more than anxious to make a success of my venture. He told me that three years of patience and hard work would do wonders.

"I always wanted to add that next acre of land to this," he added. "Then Silverhatch would be a fair-sized farm. My father wouldn't buy when it was in the market. Now someone else has taken it. There's a stretch of quite decent soil. It would make a good vegetable garden, and vegetables are badly needed in this place, as perhaps you've discovered. So is fruit. My own orchard is the most productive in the whole neighbourhood. By the way, whenever you want apples— Now, don't shake your head! You shall buy them at market price, if you wish."

"Under those circumstances I'll have a few pounds," I said. "But I've such scanty accommodation I don't know where to

put things. The larder is just a matter of shelves, in a corner of the scullery. But I'm not grumbling. Indeed, I'm very well content with my little home and its duties."

"You've not found it—lonely?"

"Not at all. I've so much to do and see to. Oh, good gracious! . . . *Dinner!* . . . I forgot all about it. I was just going to start on apple dumplings when all this happened."

"Then I won't keep you. May I give Boris his lesson before I go?"

"Lesson?"

"About the poultry. I promise you he won't chase them again."

"Can you really teach him so quickly?" I looked at the dog following meekly at his heels. "Of course, I should be thankful to know he wouldn't repeat this morning's performance. But—"

"No 'buts,' if you please. Let us agree to be friends, and accept the services of friendship without further ceremony!"

"I think you are most awfully kind," I stammered; "and I feel a perfect cadger. It's been all *your* giving and *my* taking."

"Nonsense! I've done nothing worth mentioning. Now run away and make the apple dumplings. By the way, where did you get the apples?"

"I was in Oxford yesterday and paid a visit to the market."

"Train, or bus?"

"Oh neither. Just Tony, that young undergrad you met the day your hen escaped."

"Of course. I remember him. He had a car."

"Yes. He called for me, and brought me back, and Boris also."

Boris, hearing his name, pricked inquisitive ears.

"Where do you keep him?"

"Last night we tied him up in the outhouse, but Tony said he must have a kennel."

"Yes, for the cold weather. Let me—"

"Now!" I exclaimed.

"Well really, Miss Gayle, I've sundry old ones. You see I've had a lot of dogs, different times. I'll have one cleaned and patched up and one of my farm hands can bring it round this evening. They all live in the village, somewhere, so it's on the way. He can bring it in the hand-cart."

"It seems no use to say anything to you but 'thank you, Mr. Tarquin.'"

"Between friends, gratitude doesn't need expression, Miss Shirley."

The name slipped out quite naturally. He held out his hand; slender, well-shaped, brown as his face with tan and sun and out-door life. I gave him mine, sensitive to my heart's core of the warmth and promise of the clasp that met and held it.

I always judge people by the way they shake hands. I detest a tepid, sliding, loose method. Thank goodness Tarquin stood the test!

After dinner and "washing-up" I went out to try my new bicycle. I promised Dad to be back by tea-time. With sudden remembrance of the morning's escapade I looked for Boris. He was nowhere to be seen. I wondered if he had returned to his old training home? After the exciting experiences of the morning I felt reconciled to a brief parting. No doubt he would be returned to me along with the promised kennel by the evening.

The days were drawing in rapidly. I could only spare an hour, and then must come back to prepare and give the poultry food and lock up the houses.

I started off with that thrill of new interest born of renewing an old pastime. The bike ran beautifully. The exercise was exhilarating. I made a complete circle of the district. Its extent was greater than I had supposed. The main road to Oxford cut it in half, leaving the village with its few shops in a corner of the cross-roads. On each side of this thoroughfare were the bungalows and poultry farms. The egg-interest was the speculation of the moment. As I rounded the more distant portion of the colony I came upon a nest of hovels, which rather horrified me. They seemed built up of fragments of disused railway carriages, odds and ends of zinc and tarred wood. They were so squalid and poor that I hardly believed human beings could live in them. But I saw poultry and a few pigs, and some tethered goats browsing on scant herbage. A few wild-looking women and some ragged children were visible, and one or two old men. This seemed a district to itself, signalised by utter poverty and disgraceful habitations. I resolved to make enquiries about it. Possibly Tarquin would know how and why such a slum had filtered its wretchedness into a district so unfavourable to poverty.

I passed on after that wondering survey. But it had damped my momentary exhilaration.

I scarcely noted where I wheeled till I came to a fork in the road, and found myself at the gates of the old Manor Farm. I supposed this was the main entrance. Tony and I had discovered it by another route. I now faced the front of the house, ancient and gabled, with a great oak door, and a ruined wing on its right that the friendly ivy had turned into an arch of beauty. A bit of picturesque valley showed itself in the far distance, and to right and left spread open fields; some brown and furrowed, awaiting the plough, others still green with pasturage for grazing cattle.

This, then, was the abode of Tarquinius Superbus! It seemed not ill-fitting, I thought . . . yet wondered why he should live there in such solitude.

It belonged to his father; to my old, oily patriarch "Melchizedek." Yet he gave it a wide berth, and allowed his son merely the hazards of tenantry.

I dismounted from my machine and walked slowly by, studying the beauty of the place, and admiring the wealth of shrubs and trees which my own district lacked. A fine old mansion. No wonder he was proud of it. I thought I should like to see the interior. Well, perhaps, some day—

The road went on, then broke from fields to a stretch of common. I pursued a new path, touched another hamlet, a place of squat grey houses, and on the hill crest an ancient church.

The whole county of Oxfordshire abounds in churches. Spires punctuate its village histories from the 14th to the 19th centuries, speaking out their records of worship. Many of them are very ugly. Some possess a beauty wholly in keeping with their period of architecture. As I said, the county is full of them. Perhaps because its University brought so much that was pious and learned to the surrounding districts.

I did not visit any of those I passed. But I took notes of them for Dad's guide-book if the information should be necessary.

And so back to my humble home, and my duties of the poultry yard, well pleased with my excursion and its discoveries —(à la Pepys!)

IX

From My Journal

I HAVE missed sundry "dates of entry." To-night I have again been writing to Kit; describing the ways and words of her erratic cousin, as well as my experience of poultry keeping.

I come back to my own private confidences with a sense of relief.

It is odd that it should be so, for hitherto I have talked and written to Kit as frankly as to another self. Why is it less easy at the present moment than it was, say, when I started to tell her of my new experiment?

I put down the question, but seek in vain for an answer.

I have been meditating on those things I did *not* tell Kit. Yet, after all, what do they amount to? A few meetings. A few words. A bicycle ride that ended at the Manor Farm, as far as the ride was concerned. The rest of the spare hour merged into an accepted invitation.

He had been walking across one of the meadows. I recognised the figure, and Boris immediately left me to give enthusiastic greeting. He turned and looked, said something to the dog, and then called out directions to me.

Over dividing spaces of grass and garden path I came to a side door in the low stone wall. He opened this and asked me to come in. I did.

I had adopted that "on the land" dress of leggings and short skirt and woollen jumper, which suited my work. It was also convenient for cycling. But when he had introduced me to an old oak-beamed kitchen, beautiful with age and memories, I felt I should have been in homespun and mob cap. From there he took me into a wonderful old hall, with open timber roof and early decorated windows. It was sparsely furnished. Merely a table and a few chairs and a great carved oak bookcase. He explained it as originally the living-room of the owners. It was fourteenth or fifteenth-century. In ancient times the fire was laid on a brazier in the centre of this hall and the smoke escaped through what was termed a "louvre" in the roof. All business and entertainment took place there, and meals were served for family and guests alike. An arched doorway led to another room, and a passage to kitchen and larders. Thence a staircase twisted to the upper chambers. "Mere lofts," he told me.

He had made one into a bedroom, but lived in the kitchen. A good old dame, wife of his head man, cooked and cleaned for him, he said. "They have a cottage near that bit of common land. It ought to belong to this Manor estate, but there's some old deed prevents it."

We returned to the kitchen, and he begged me to stay for tea. I would have loved to do so, but my own duties were imperative.

"Will you come again?" he asked. "I'll show you all over the place. It's worth studying. Wouldn't your father like to see it? It's an easy walk by that short cut."

I promised to persuade Dad, and we fixed an afternoon so that I could arrange for Mrs. Malone to do the feeding of my "Wyndiottes" (my pet name for the white ladies!).

It is all this on which I am meditating to-night. Yet I have not included it in my letter of news. Neither have I said anything about a strange personality impressed upon that old Manor Farm, and what it stands for. Industry. Tireless work. Work of the master as well as the man. Ploughing, sowing, reaping. The care of earth. The care of poultry. The care of orchard and kitchen garden. It seemed to me amazing. So much to do and so few to do it.

Four years he had lived and worked in that old half-empty house. Hard work all day, and at night only his own company or that of some half-trained animal. I closed my eyes and seemed to see him as I had seen him standing in the field this afternoon. Tall and thin and muscular, in brown jersey and short khaki breeches and leather gaiters. Collarless and coatless; his neck bare and tanned, his head uncovered.

If I had been an artist I should have painted "Son of the Soil" using him as a model.

I wonder what makes me write all this? The obsession of a memory from which I can't escape, just as sometimes we can't escape from the haunting of a song, or a voice?

"Tarquinius Superbus"—the jest and the name, and yet the reality so much a part of both. Something fine and purposeful; his foot on the soil he had mastered; his eyes on the far hills of weather chances. His life centred into interests that meant a deep love for the land on which he worked; a passionate resolve to conquer it; to turn its wild harsh soil into fruitfulness; to tame rebellion and charm possibilities. No mean ambition for those who love Nature, and love the freedom of

out-door life, and love still more the sense of conquest over difficulties such as life can provide.

"I shan't rest till it's mine," he had said to me. "All I wring from the soil is like blood money put aside for purchase. I deny myself a great deal in order that I may one day claim possession."

I heard him with some sense of wonder. Had he been a descendant of the original family, had there been some romance of heritage . . . but no. There was nothing of that sort. Simply love of a bit of English soil. The craving to call his own something he had tamed and conquered and made beautiful.

I had heard from others of the ruined farm land and neglected acres which had meant "a bargain" to old Melchizedek and which his son's industry had turned to value.

"He ought to give it him as a reward," I said to myself. "He has worked so hard, made it so wonderful; and to think that old man could turn him out, or sell it over his head to-morrow!"

Dad seemed much interested in my account of the old Manor Farm. He had seen it on the occasion of his rare walks, and when I gave him Tarquin's invitation he welcomed it eagerly.

"There's quite a history about that old place," he said; "and, had circumstances permitted, it is the one house in the neighbourhood I should have liked as my home. There is something dignified about a farm house, especially one so ancient; there is nothing dignified in a modern bungalow."

I agreed, but pointed out that necessity is a stern taskmaster, and we could not have afforded to rent a place like the Manor, or to work it.

"Mr. Tarquin understands farming, and turns every rod and perch of ground to service. If he wasn't extraordinarily energetic he couldn't keep up such a place."

No more was said, but I waited on the day of our visit with a new sense of interest, only praying it might be fine for sake of boots—and "short cuts."

I may as well state here that eggs were getting plentiful, and the fowls behaving well. Mrs. Malone had taken Madam Waddles, nest and all, into her kitchen, and assured me that the "hatch would come out grand"—if only I'd leave the matter to her.

I was too completely ignorant of such mysteries to doubt her word. No other hen had gone "broody," and the old lady

seemed quite content. She had been disinfected, or, as Tony expressed it, dis-insect-fected, and she came off her eggs merely at feeding time, and, in fact, behaved as any well-conducted hen ought to behave. I understood the process took twenty-one days, and I was looking eagerly forward to my first batch of chicks. So much so that Mrs. Malone took occasion to inform me that half of the batch would be hers, " and maybe 'tis two or three won't come out at all," she added.

I said I should know if the old lady's own two came out. I should recognise their size and the colour of the shells. Mrs. Malone seemed taken aback at this information. She muttered something about " thim as purtended to know so little was often knowing too much."

If I feel I want to write reams about that old Manor house and about that farm !

Tarquin received us at the entrance gates and led us into the beautiful old hall. There were rugs on the floor to-day, and a blazing fire of logs in the great open fireplace. The table was spread with a lovely embroidered cloth. He said he had bought it from a Moorish pedlar. There were late chrysanthemums in an old delf bowl, and such wonderful bread and girdle cakes and cream that Dad complimented him on his housekeeper.

I was asked to preside at the tea-tray.

I told him he ought to have treated us with less ceremony, and given us tea in that fine old kitchen.

He gave the Arab quotation of " the best for the guest who honours the house." Dad pursued this erudition into desert wilds and adventures, and we learnt more about our host than he had yet confessed.

He seemed to have had many adventures. To have " knocked about the world," as he called it, from boyhood. He knew Greece and Italy and France and Egypt, and much of that fateful and unfortunate land so disastrous to our forces in the war—Mesopotamia.

" I would rather not talk of that time," he said abruptly. " It was devils' work, and set the seal on the most disastrous blunderings ever perpetrated by politicians."

As the war and those political blunderings were the " red rag " of Dad's unfailing animosity, I was not sorry to change the subject.

It seemed a far jump to English agriculture and the old-world

sterility of a present location; to his account of that fight with the soil and the hopes of potential fruitfulness. He touched lightly on the difficulties of procuring assistance and the year's end to year's end labour which, as yet, held little advantage.

Dad questioned as to how the wily old Patriarch had secured this historic heritage? It seemed just one of those chances of war time. The owner had sacrificed his only son to the cause of England. Then, broken in health and fortune, had sold his barren acres and the half-ruined homestead for anything they could fetch.

"Melchizedek's" chance!

He bought it and repaired the living rooms, and put his son on it to work out some prosperity.

He recognised that wheat and oats, and vegetables and fruit, not to mention the dairy supply, would be of immense profit in a neighbourhood like this.

The poultry industry was a thing apart from farming. He had laughed sometimes at his son's craze for the land. Now he saw opportunity of utilising it. So Tarquin had set to work, and with only two assistants (and the old housekeeper for the dairy work) had turned the place into what we saw.

It was wonderful. Even Dad acknowledged that, as we talked it over in our little homely parlour. Very small, very insignificant it looked that night of our return. For we had been shown all over that beautiful old house. Its panelled rooms; its brick fireplaces; its carved doorways. We went up the twisting staircase and saw many quaint chambers, small and unfurnished, with tiny deep-set windows. The right wing was quite a ruin, but the thick walls made a stolid division between what was useless and usable.

There were great possibilities in the old house. Its tenant recognised that. I had a suspicion that those possibilities made him uneasy. He was being exploited for a purpose. When he had brought the place into a profitable and prosperous condition his father would probably sell it. And it was easy to see that the spell of its ancient beauty and ancient memories had fallen upon its present tenant, had been the incentive to work for and in its honour, so that the old house, looking over wide green acres and noble pasturage, might once again re-live something of its old glories.

Meantime, its new master bent his back to the spade and followed the plough, and helped to sow his crops and reap his harvests. He had dug and manured the rough, neglected soil.

He had spared neither toil nor experiment so only result should smile on endeavour, and the barns enclose stores of healthy grain.

Never had I believed the history of farming could hold such interest as Tarquin made it hold by his description. Never had I pictured anything so simply heroic, yet so unpretentious, as his brief account of his struggles with adverse circumstance.

Here, in these tempestuous days, with the cry of hardship and unemployment echoing throughout the land, one man, at all events, had set his mind to work and his strength to conquer man's most stubborn foe. For the land is a foe—an adversary too often helped by every force of Nature as set against human endeavour.

Drought when rain is needed; dripping skies when harvest fields are waiting the reaper's touch; blight and fruitlessness when one had hoped for rich crops and orchard triumphs; and so on, and so on. The "farmer's year book" of trouble is a full-paged volume!

I was surprised that our host made so light of his own troubles. Perhaps because he loved the land he put up with its shortcomings as we put up with children's errors, or our friends' occasional fall from grace.

I only know I could have listened to him for hours, and that that tea, and the picture of his dark, earnest face, set against the leaping red of the firelight and the old panelled walls, went with me as unforgettable memories of a wonderful home and a wonderful man. I had always worshipped strength in that special form of deeds accomplished under difficulty. A man's *will* to conquer and win success at any cost. So, all the great things in life and in the history of the world have been accomplished. So only can they be accomplished again.

The world of to-day, the England of to-day, may well look back with envy on its heroic dead. May well look on with foreboding and distrust at its unheroic living. Where is to be found a great patriot, a great statesman, a great Christian?

Small-mindedness, selfishness, greed, vanity, of these we see enough and more than enough. The man-made machinery of a disgraceful war has turned out a peace as disgraceful. Some hidden hand of cowardice plays card after card to an opponent's trumps! Blunders increase; and with them poverty, stress, irreligion, crime. To those who watch, above all to those who *think*, the peril of the Future shows clear as a menace of coming years.

I hope I may not live to see that menace fulfilled. I feel I could not face another war ; another Armageddon.

December 1st

We have had a spell of bad weather. Heavy rain, cold biting winds. My draggled poultry look miserable as they peradventure into scratching yard or grass enclosure.

Boris remains in the kitchen ; well-behaved and companionable. Whatever spell his trainer laid upon him holds good. He never chases the fowls now nor molests Pat, though he does not like him.

It is no use to mind weather when one has out-door occupation. I splash about in mud and rain ; collect eggs and feed the birds, and pay a daily visit to Mrs. Waddles. Sometimes Uncle Timothy strolls in through the hedge and passes the "time o' day" with the patient sitter.

She has a quiet corner, fenced off by an old half-broken screen. Here she and expectation keep their vigil !

I have seen nothing of Tony for nearly a week. I put it down to weather. It could be no pleasure to motor over miry roads and through drenching rain just to exchange greetings.

Once a week I have to bear my tribute to the depôt. It is a blessing to be saved packing and despatching and the uncertainties of custom. Here, they purchase all one has, large or small quantities, and make monthly payments.

My contributions have run up from dozens to scores. This last time we topped the hundreds ! I was very pleased. I had received a respectable cheque on the 1st of the month, and looked forward to increasing awards as the year sped on.

December 9th

This afternoon, to my surprise, we received a visit from the Patriarch !

It was a grey, dull afternoon, with a moist coldness that sank into one's skin and deadened one's faculties. I had hurried over my duties, and returned gladly to the warmth of the kitchen.

Boris was standing up and manifesting signs of uneasiness. Then, across the passage came the sound of voices. Wondering who could have called I threw off my cap and raincoat and went into the parlour.

Boris gave a low uncanny growl.

I found Dad and the venerable "Melchizedek" sitting on

opposite sides of a blazing fire. They seemed to have had an enjoyable commune over all and sundry, but my return was greeted as prophetic of creature comforts.

The Patriarch explained he had come over to arrange some business with his son. He had looked in on his way to find out how I was getting on with my particular industry.

Dad had been giving glowing accounts of "hen fruit." I took the opportunity of informing the wily old gentleman that I had nothing to thank *him* for on that account.

He looked surprised when he heard of the sale of the Sussex. "Such fine table birds!"

I explained I had not wanted "table birds" but good layers, and breeders. I must have plenty of eggs and plenty of chickens.

"Yes," he said cheerfully. "I see your point. But you did not explain. . . ."

"I was rather ignorant. I have learnt a great deal since I came here."

"It is the heart of the industry," he agreed. One could not but learn if one kept eyes and ears open.

"I thought you were going abroad?" I said, as I cleared the table of books and papers preparatory to tea.

"I am. There has been delay. Many affairs I had to settle. It is all right now. I came over to bid my son farewell, and thought I would drop in here on the way. That orange light of your windows looked so cheerful—and inviting."

He glanced at my Liberty casement hangings. "You have made so pretty a room," he went on; "hardly should I know it. Wonderful—the woman's touch!"

I left him meditating, and hurried off for the tea-things and to make toast. I hoped his visit boded no ill to Tarquin. That the "business" he had mentioned had nothing to do with the farm. He had sold all his poultry-runs, he informed us. I had an uneasy feeling that there was yet another sale in his mind. To get rid of all his property at one swoop and then leave the country had been a previous intention. As I busied myself over tea I felt an odd presentiment. This visit was not mere chance. It meant something. . . . I only hoped it did not forebode a change in the Manor Farm. I thought of Tarquin's explanations, of his untiring industry, his love for the place, his boundless capacity for work. Surely . . . surely . . .

My thoughts broke off to scents of burning toast. Hastily I repaired injuries and cut fresh slices. Fortunately I had made

a cake that morning. With a glass dish of jam, and another of little rolls of butter, I decorated the table. Then brought in tea and buttered toast.

The Patriarch did ample justice to the homely fare.

"I should not have had such a meal at the farm," he said, handing over his cup for a third replenishment. "My son keeps a meagre table, and he lives in the kitchen. . . It is homely but so *bourgeois*."

"But—" began Dad.

I touched his foot warningly. Our eyes met. I could read his bewildered—"what?" but hastened to say that with such a noble old kitchen a solitary man was wise to turn it to account.

"Solitary!" he echoed. "Yes; it is as you say. A lonely life; not a wholesome one for a man in his prime, and of talents. . . . Ah, music, languages, all that. . . . Yet he prefers to dig the ungrateful soil and wring out from it such poor crops as scarce repay the price of the seed he must purchase."

"I think he has done wonders," I said, with eager championship. "And he never spares himself."

"He has forty acres of wheat and oats," mused the old man. "He wants me to buy more land to add to it. If I did——"

His cunning old eyes narrowed. "It would be the finest property for miles around. But . . . everyone tells me the soil here is so bad that to farm it is a hazard. Perhaps I should do better to sell—in plots."

"Sell!—" I could not help the note of indignation. "Oh! I hope you won't sell that beautiful ancient place! It might be spoilt by modern innovations. The grounds turned into poultry farms! As if there weren't more than enough already!"

"You seem to share my son's infatuation for the place. He has certainly improved it; the ground, I mean. It was half a wilderness. He had a steam-plough to work, and he used some new sort of manure. The second year he had quite good crops. He has done well with his dairy, too. His is the only milk-supplying farm in the neighbourhood. And fruit . . . Yes. He knows what it is he does, my son Tarquin."

"Why did you give him a Roman name?" asked Dad.

"You find it strange, eh?"

"Unusual. Your family is Greek, you said."

He nodded.

"We have a strange history. Our misfortunes would make a volume of Æschylus. I call Tarquin after a great ruler

One day I thought he, too, may make for himself a great name. But his ambition lies not that way. The war gave him chances, but he hated the war. He let his name be passed over for others less deserving. And then he needs must fall in love with a mildewed ruin and a score of barren acres! I cannot understand. From the hour he saw that place and stood in that house he was obsessed, as you call it! It has become a passion with him. The Manor House Farm means more than love, or power, or ambition!"

"Then don't talk of selling it!" I implored. "Wait on his success and see what he will make of it."

"You believe in him?"

There was a leer in his wicked old eyes that belied the patriarchal solemnity of the beard.

I did not like the expression, or the seeming contradiction.

"Of course, I believe in him!" I said staunchly. "I have seen what he has done, and heard what the place was like before he undertook to change it."

"He is fortunate to have so sweet a champion," said the old fraud, and with a bow he rose. "I must now be setting forth," he announced.

I suggested the lantern and Pat. It was dark, and the roads so bad. He had come from the station by the bus, but it was no use for side tracks, even if it had been running.

"I do not like that boy. Often have I had to chastise him, but I fear I must accept that offer. I should not find it easy to discover the road; by its short way, I mean."

"Oh, you mustn't take the short cut in this darkness, and after all the rain!"

So I bustled off and roused Pat and got out the lantern, and despatched our guest with little goodwill, and no regret at what he called a "final visit." I went to the gate. It was no longer raining, and a pale gleam of moonlight illumined the road.

I gave Pat the lantern, and bade him carry it so that the old gentleman might see where he trod. He would have a long walk, more than a mile. I ordered the boy to bring the lantern back.

"And I'll give you a shilling," I said, lowering my voice.

"A shilling ain't much to be givin' me for me trouble," he muttered sulkily.

"Better than a thrashing, as I gave you the last time we met," said the Patriarch genially.

I caught a glimpse of Pat's scowling face. I had never seen

anything so evil or so vicious as it looked in the lantern's light. I felt almost sorry I had asked him to do this. Better if I had gone myself. But it was too late now.

They were trudging off. A queer pair, and no love lost between them. The old man had a stout stick in his hand. I noticed that, even as I noticed his somewhat feeble gait. I found myself thinking he must be very old, and wondering why he could not let his son live his life in his own way.

X

Later.

I WENT back to the parlour. Boris met me at the door with a smile of affability.

(Scoffers, who say "a dog can't smile," know nothing about dogs!)

I patted his head. "Why wouldn't you come in and see the visitor?" I asked.

Of course, that question received no answer, but I found myself wondering whether the animal had some reason for disliking the old man. Perhaps in those training days—

"I'm glad I haven't to turn out," said Dad cheerfully. "I feel in the mood to write to-night. So if you'll clear the table—"

I was putting plates and cups on the tray as he spoke.

"How does the book get on?" I enquired. "A chapter done?"

He looked scornful. "Enough for half-a-dozen chapters! And a good selling title. That really was an inspiration!"

"Yes," I said. "May one hear?"

"I'm calling it—'A Guide to Nowhere in Particular.'"

As I looked doubtful he added, "It will give information of a *useful* kind. Side-tracks as well as roads. Small hostelries as well as expensive hotels. Interest, not architecture. Places, not churches. . . .

> "Where'er I roam in this fair land
> The vision of a temple meets my eyes . . ."

"Yes. That's just it. Temple! Stuff a guide-book with

descriptions of every village church, its age and period, and you've done your duty. But the ordinary traveller doesn't care a brass farthing for churches! They're merely an exploitation of the "tipping" system. You go in, or you ask for permission to go in, and forthwith steps out some seedy-looking exponent of dates and history, which you don't want and can't remember, and for which he looks askance at a proffered shilling! No, no, my dear! What the O.T. wants to know is where to get accommodation (on reasonable terms), style of cookery; scale of 'tips' and how to evade same. Possible amusements to be found. Is there a Library? Billiards? Picture house? Also a little local information as to climate, rents, locomotion. (This in case our traveller should be seeking a house, or take a fancy to the neighbourhood!) There—*multum in parvo*. And useful *multum*, you must acknowledge!"

I said it sounded all right.

"I'm only wondering whether you'll find anyone to publish that sort of guide?" I added. "For it really wouldn't be a guide in the acknowledged meaning of the word."

"I knew I might expect no encouragement from those of my own household," said the aggrieved author. "Always that. The prophet—and the unbelievers in his prophecies . . . And what the devil's the matter with that dog?" he added irritably. "Up and down, up and down, and sniffing the air as if he scented an enemy!"

It was true. Boris had walked restlessly from that chair where the Patriarch had sat to the door and then back again, with a low growl and a sniff at the air. Extraordinary conduct!

I took up the tray and called to him. He followed me to the kitchen, and I bade him lie down on the rug before the fire. He obeyed. But as I moved to and fro, putting things away and then washing up, he watched me in an odd and restless way. Perpetual lifting of his head . . . those "sniffs," . . . a whimper of uneasiness.

"You don't scent burglars, old fellow?" I said, stooping to pat him as I returned from the scullery. "What on earth's the matter to-night?"

When I drew up my chair and seated myself for my usual journalistic scribble he grew quieter. He came and laid his head on my lap and looked at me with those beautiful wistful eyes.

How I wish an animal could speak! How I wish they would not gaze at us in that appealing, heart-breaking fashion which means "*can't* you understand?"

I talked to him. I patted him and pulled his ears, and at last he lay down.

I commenced to write. Time passed swiftly. I concluded all my entries "to date," and put down my pen.

Suddenly Boris rose, lifted his head, and gave a strange melancholy *howl*.

Annoyed and worried, I spoke almost crossly. I fastened the strap to his collar and led him to the outer door where stood his kennel.

"Now go in," I said, "and go to bed." Then as he obeyed I stared around. Whiteness everywhere. Snowing. It was still falling. Soft flakes whirled and fluttered about my head and settled on my hair.

I wondered if Pat had returned. It struck me I had not heard him bring back the lantern, and that he might have taken it into his mother's house. I wondered, too, how long the snow had been falling. Had the Patriarch arrived before its commencement? Pat would have had a cold journey back for the wind had risen, cruel with bite and blow. Of course he would not trouble to return the lantern.

With a memory of how cold and bitter that wind could be on these bleak flats I unfastened the chain again and took the dog back into the scullery. "You can stay there to-night," I told him, and saw him settle down on the rough strip of fibre that served me as a mat.

I returned to the comfort of my kitchen, inwardly hoping that this sudden change of weather would not materially affect my feathered colony.

I looked at the clock. Ten minutes past nine. I don't know what made me notice it with a sort of *back* glance at what the hour had portended. A memory that, as it struck, Boris had risen and given that strange howl! . . . Perhaps he had scented the fall of snow or the return of Pat, whom he cordially disliked.

As I stood meditating I heard a clumsy knocking at the outer door. I went to open it. Pat was standing there, white with snow, the lantern in his hand.

"I'm after bringing it back as ye tould me," he muttered, and thrust it towards me. It was still alight.

"Will you come in and have a cup of cocoa? I'm just going to make it."

"No," he said, keeping by the door, and keeping me in the draught. "It's just to say that I left th' ould man at the gate, and cum straight back."

"That's all right, and I suppose you want your shilling?"

I dived into my overall pocket and produced my purse. I took out the coin and gave it to the boy, at the same time taking the lantern from his outstretched hand.

"Why, what's that on your fingers?" I exclaimed. . . . "Blood?"

"I knocked me hand 'gainst the fence," he muttered, and seized the coin and went off through the snow and darkness to his own domicile.

I blew out the lantern and hung it up on its nail. Once more I locked the door, and hoped I should not have any more disturbance. Again Boris growled. I scolded him for such unusual bad temper. Then took up the little aluminium pan to prepare our evening cocoa. Being too soon to disturb Dad, I went on with my writing.

(This brings me to the half-hour.)

December 10*th*

This morning I woke to a world of brilliant whiteness. Beautiful, no doubt; picturesque—but oh! the discomfort. There must have been a very heavy fall of snow. When I went to the outer door I stood appalled. The drifts meant absolute *wading*. My poor birds! . . .

I wished someone would turn up to clear a path for me. It looked a formidable task. From back door to hen-houses meant plodding knee-deep through those moist cold masses. I seized a spade and tried to clear a track for myself. "If only that wretched Pat would come round," I thought.

But he didn't, nor anyone else, so I struggled manfully with my task, until I made a narrow passage. Then I mixed the hot mash and bore it forth; the wind whistling round my head and whipping my cheeks with stinging blows.

I felt angry and uncomfortable. This was not the sort of weather to put anyone in a good temper. And that Patriarch had told me—"Quite mild winters."

Mila! Ye gods, if this was a specimen of mildness!

I got through my duties somehow, and shut the birds into

their houses till the snow-storm was over. But after breakfast it came on again. A thick heavy pall lay over everything; the flakes whirled and whistled through the air with blinding perversity.

I blessed heaven when, about ten o'clock, the faithful Ganders turned up. He said he thought I must be "in a pretty takin'." I certainly was. But his advent improved matters. He was used to snowfalls, though he allowed this was "oncommon early" for such a visitation.

How can women be so foolish as to think they can do without men! I certainly felt they were a glorious creation as I saw paths cleared, and the birds tended, for my faithful helper remained the best part of the day. He had had the sense to bring some steak from the butcher's, so I made a savoury stew, which he shared and appreciated.

At three o'clock the snow was still falling, and it was growing dark. He took out the food for the fowls and locked the houses. "I'm feared we're in for a reg'lar bad night," he said. 'But don't you worry, Miss. I'll be round as early as I can. They birds won't hurt for breakfast a bit later. I've give 'em a goodish meal and filled their water-troughs."

I thanked him warmly and dispensed the usual half-crown with a sense of meanness. But he was quite content.

As I shut the back door I looked at the ominous grey sky, the thick pall of unrelieved snow.

Mrs. Malone brought me in some goat's milk. She was the only visitor I had all day.

I missed Tony's cheery voice and habit of "blowing in" unexpectedly. Of course, roads were impassable. Then suddenly I remembered the Patriarch. He was to have stayed the night with his son and left next morning. That would mean *this* morning. But no bus could have run between Clan ditch and the station. I wondered what had happened? I put the question to Dad, staring discontentedly from the window, and muttering that the country was never habitable after summer had closed.

"Of course, he's had to stay on," he answered. "No one could have got out this morning except on a steam plough!"

He went to the table and opened drawers and took out his papers and memorandums.

"It'll soon be tea-time," I exclaimed. "No use to begin work now."

He gave it as his opinion that an author was a being evidently created for persecution. If it wasn't publishers it was proofs, and if they failed it was his own family.

I had originally suggested a smaller dining-table, so that he could have another one for writing and keep it to himself. I reminded him again of the suggestion.

He glanced round at our limited space. "Well, perhaps . . . but don't you remember this dining-table can easily be made smaller? Take out the middle leaf, and there you are. We're only two. Quite big enough even if a friend drops in. . . . Then mine could stand in the window."

His good humour returned. He began to sort out his papers. "I'll put them straight and put them aside for the present. I shall not be able to work in earnest until I've an undisturbed place."

I watched him sorting, examining, laying page to page.

Suddenly he paused. "Why—what's this, Shirley?"

I looked. He was holding up some loose pages . . . not exactly letter paper, but the sort of ruled foolscap that note-books and account books contain.

"It's not mine," he muttered. "Look, child can you make it out?"

I took the papers from his hand. I saw figures; small, neat writing; memos, calculations. They were single sheets, pinned together by a small patent fastener. I turned them over. I caught sight of some words . . . part of a letter seemingly. A different handwriting. . . .

I tell you the suggestion is hateful. I'd sooner die than give it up. If you won't agree to my offer, then so much the worse for you—

The paper was torn here. There was no signature. Evidently the fragment of a letter. But whose?

"It's very queer," I said to Dad. "How on earth did these papers get on your table?"

Then light flashed on me.

"Mr. Marsyas! Could he have dropped them, and you picked them up and put them with your own?"

He thought that might have happened. I handed them back. Part of a letter, but no clue to the writer.

"Well—if they belong to old Marsyas and he hasn't missed them, they may not be important. You know he said

he was going to South America. He had taken his passage. He'll do his best to get off."

I nodded. "Better keep them until I see his son. He'll know the writing?"

So Dad put them into an envelope and placed that on the mantelshelf—"as a reminder"—he told me. Then he went on with his work and I returned to the kitchen.

But I could not get that sentence out of my head. A threat . . . a hint of animosity. Who had written it? On whose behalf were those calculations; those details of acreage and crops and cattle?

The Manor Farm!

The name started to my mind, though it had not appeared on the paper. I recalled the old man's words. I remembered his character for rapacity and hard bargains. He had wanted to sell that property, and if he did it would mean the banishment of Tarquin. I knew how hard he had worked. With what love he had grown to regard the beautiful old house, those now fruitful acres. Above all things he had feared to lose them as reward of his labours. But I had heard a threat of such loss from his father's lips, and seen it repeated in those calculated profits.

The whole matter was significant of trouble. I grew keenly conscious that the trouble might have begun.

It was impossible to learn anything. I could not get to the Manor Farm, nor was its owner likely to come over to us while the snow drifts barred cycling possibilities. Distinctly uncomfortable, I had to content myself with the fire and my work and the company of Boris until tea-time. Then I returned to the parlour and the subject, only to find Dad had quite forgotten it. He had hit upon some fresh inspiration for his guide-book; also—the afternoon post had brought him a letter from his bank manager.

He had the letter beside his plate, and regarded it from time to time with a pleased expression.

"Balance all right?" I enquired.

"Excellent, my dear. Excellent. You must have done well. I am very satisfied."

I felt a little puzzled. The cheques I had received for eggs were not so surprisingly large as to merit this enconium!

"May I see?"

He handed me the letter.

I read, "We acknowledge your favour of 3rd inst. and cheque to your credit £100."

I stared. "A hundred pounds! . . . My dear Dad, there must be some mistake!'

"I hope not," he said. "There's a great deal of comfort in a hundred pounds."

"But you never paid in such a cheque?"

"Not personally. I imagined it was you. Poultry profits, of course?"

I smiled. "Hardly that, as yet. I can't make it out."

I re-read the letter. Just a few printed lines and a few written words. Then light burst upon me.

"Tony!" I gasped. . . . "Of course, it's Tony! That's what he called the deed of partnership."

"Very kind of him. But a very unorthodox partnership. What does he expect to get in return for his hundred pounds?"

"Goodness knows! It's a crazy idea. I thought he was in fun."

"Well, he's shown some wisdom in investing his money instead of squandering it in the foolish fashion of Oxford students. Most delicately done. . . ." (He quite *purred* over the letter as he read it again.) . . . "Paid in to my account. Well, well, he's a good boy, and a kind-hearted one, for all his frivolity. I shall thank him next time I see him."

I looked doubtful.

"Do you think we ought to accept this?"

"Why not? If he calls himself a partner and has an interest in the farm?"

So I said no more. I would wait till the young man's next visit and then have it out with him.

Dad made an excellent tea, and as I cleared the table observed, "Now you can go into Oxford and buy me that writing-table as soon as the weather clears!"

Later.

I had looked out the last thing before closing up. The snow had ceased but the wind was still keen; and though the sky looked clear there was no promise of a thaw.

Bother the weather! . . . I said it angrily, and Boris seemed to agree. He made no effort to promenade our wintry-looking domain.

I closed the door, and went within to unburden myself of troubled thoughts. I don't know why I should feel troubled, but I do.

XI

December 11th

To-day showed little improvement in the weather. Bitter biting wind, and masses of frozen snow. The leafless trees held a burden of white which even the rough blasts had not released. The sky was sunless.

In leggings and overall and strong shoes I made my way to the poultry houses. (Duty is imperative.)

I should not have been surprised to find their inmates frozen to death, but they were quite spry and hungry! I dared not let them out for fear they should get suffocated in the snow. It was so deep. Only my own tiny track was navigable. I gave the poor, brave things a hearty meal. "Ovum" and meat-scraps and peelings of potatoes and vegetables; also some good hot bran. Then I once more shut them up till the weather should improve.

Mrs. Malone managed to drop in this morning. She said all the village was out clearing roadway and paths. The baker and butcher also paid us a visit and I laid in stores for fear of more bad weather. Of groceries I always kept a reserve supply. Next, a belated postman appeared bearing papers and letters. I had one from Tony. Characteristic, as usual.

"How goes it, priceless old thing? I'm fed up with this beastly weather. Can't get to you. Hope you're pulling along. Paid in my partnership contribution! Deed will follow anon. Of course, half the blooming chuck-chucks now belong to me; so you can have one killed and trussed for roasting and send it down, when agreeable. No eggs. I'm bilious this cold weather, also I've been grinding. Not that the subjects interest me, or will be a dam bit o' use in my 'career.' But these old Dons, they seem to think if you don't take up something you ought to be lassoed out of bounds. In other words, rusticated for the remainder of term. So there you have it all. I've keenly felt our separation. Hope it won't last much longer. But I fear dear little Morris wouldn't like the snow drifts. Might get a chill. His interior is delicate, and needs care.

Well, cheerio, old thing! I'll be round as soon as the roads are clear. You know, or perhaps you don't *know, that term ends on 17th. I'm not sure about going home this vac. Then there's Xmas. I think I ought to spend it with you to liven you up. What?*

Tony.

I put the sheet back in its envelope. Term over so soon? I had forgotten that. Of course, he ought to go home. Or he might be expected to join his mother and aunt and Kit on the Riviera? I was not looking forward to Christmas with any sense of festivity this year. We would be by ourselves, just Dad and I, unless, of course, Tony did come over to cheer us up.

I must make some sort of a plum pudding, and we could roast a plump young cockerel for dinner. Stuffed with sausage meat and served with bread sauce and good brown gravy! Dad would like that. And then, quite suddenly, I thought of the lonely owner of the Manor Farm. Should I suggest asking him also? Oh! Once more to have late dinner and a well-arranged table. Flowers and candle-shades. Fun and frolic. A Christmas party as of old! . . .

Mrs. Malone persisted in hanging round the kitchen. Still discursive. I told her Pat might have come in the day before to help me. That I had had to shovel away the snow myself.

She said I didn't expect much. "Him goin' errands an' all. And the bad could on him after sending the poor child all that long way in the storm wid an ungrateful ould ruffian who'd not part a sixpence to reward him." Why couldn't I have let the man find his own way to the Farm? He knew it well enough. No fear but he'd have got there, lantern or no lantern.

I told her it was pitch dark. That's why I made Pat take the lantern. I added I was sorry if he'd got a cold. She should put his feet in mustard and hot water. Then I enquired for Mrs. Waddles.

"Sittin' like a Christian, she is, the crayture, and takin' her food that sensible! There's one week more to go and we'll have the chicks out and runnin' over the flure beyant as lively as young rabbits."

Pleased at the news I went to the scullery and mixed a bowl of hard grain for the exemplary lady. Mrs. Malone followed and hindered and counselled in her exasperating Irish way. Presently I saw her eyeing the lantern where it hung on a nail in the wall. She went a step nearer. "It might be claner," she said, and unhooked it.

I glanced at the smeared glass. On one side it was broken.

"It does look dirty. It's just as Pat gave it me. . . . What's that smear?"

"'Tis perhaps the way his hand was bleedin'. He fell on thim sharp stones that's nigh the ould farm gates."

" I know it's a bad road. His hand was bleeding when he gave me the lantern, but he told me he had knocked it against the fence."

(Now, in looking back at this occurrence, or rather, at my description of it, I find that Pat had told two different stories.) His mother went on to say the boy was " strange in his head " ever since that night. He'd sit by the fire glowering and muttering, and his hand was so swollen she had been obliged to poultice it.

Evidently she blamed me for all this. Mr. Marsyas was no favourite of hers or of Pat's. It turned out that he had used the boy " cruel " while he employed him. He had to work from six of the morning to six of the evening. He was badly fed, and more than once " the ould villain had thrashed him ! "

" Only that times was bad and I hard put to it to make a shilling or two besides me rint, I'd never have let him stay," said Mrs. Malone.

While speaking she had found a cloth and was cleaning the smeared glass. She re-hung the lantern on its nail, then took the bowl from my hands.

" I needn't expect any help from Pat, then ? " I asked.

" I'd hardly like to promise, his constitution being what it is. Ye'd best get hould o' Jimmy Ganders, so ye had. He's a man, and the strength's in him that's niver been with my poor boy, nor likely to be."

" How old is Pat, really ? "

" He's turned sixteen this last St. Patrick's Day."

I was astonished. The boy looked about twelve, and had the intellect of a child. A foolish, tiresome boy, and half-witted, yet this mother of his idolised him. How strange women were ! Motherhood, even if degraded or ashamed of what it had borne, was still uplifted by some belief in itself.

Same Evening.

The hours of this day have sped on to evening. Just routine and housewifely duties to keep one employed. I could not go out. I could not restore those papers, or question Tarquin of his father's visit.

I found myself growing restless. The tea hour was over. Another long evening faced me. Of course, I could bring my work into the parlour, as Dad was not writing. But I had a suspicion that he liked to be alone so as to indulge in a snooze.

He denied the accusation, but I had to return a verdict of "Found guilty" on many occasions.

"Are you going to do any writing?" I asked him as I cleared the table.

"I may make a few notes and do a bit of reading, but the serious part of my work is waiting on that promised table."

"And that must wait on weather and a visit to Oxford. I expect Tony will run up here as soon as the snow clears. We seem to have had a very heavy fall."

"Just my luck," he grumbled. "Whenever I go to a new place I find I am in for the coldest winter or the hottest summer the inhabitants have experienced for years! By the bye, Shirley, don't you think it's time we had a visit from a cleric? There surely must be a cure of souls in the neighbourhood? I've seen a distant church spire. But after two months' residence we haven't received a single visit from a church representative. I'm wondering if there is a doctor or a clergyman to look after us? They've not intimated as much."

"We may get on just as well without them."

"True. Most visitors are a confounded nuisance. Still, I begin to feel curious."

I told him that the whole neighbourhood seemed given up to poultry farming, and that social life, as we had been accustomed to regard it, consisted here of occasional teas and whist parties. As for a clergyman—I hadn't set eyes on one, nor had I been to church. The nearest meant a two-mile walk, and my Sundays were busy days. Perhaps when the fine weather set in I might sample an evening service, but, as Dad knew perfectly well, neither he nor I were great church-goers. Yet for all that, in his secret heart he resented the neglect of a "diaconal shepherd," as I had once christened a venerable canon of our acquaintance.

"You ought not to worry about clerical indifference," I said in conclusion. "You'd be asked to attend early services, and give to the choir fund, or the home mission teas, or attend Sales of Work. I'm very thankful we are left alone. If I told the local vicar I couldn't go to church because I had to cook the dinner and he pointed out that it was our duty to have a cold dinner on Sunday, what would you say?

"Tell him to mind his own business!" quoth my parent wrathfully.

"Exactly. And he'd say that his business was your spiritual

welfare, and probably add that such welfare stood in need of the cherishing and sustenance of the church."

Dad waived aside further argument and dismissed me making a great show of papers and books and the adjustment of light. So I retired to my kitchen and prepared to wash the tea-things.

Still Later.

I think it was about eight o'clock when Boris, who had been sitting by the fire, made a sudden spring to the outer door. He gave his bark of welcome. At the same moment I heard a knock. I went out and opened it.

There was light enough, for the moon was getting to the full and the extraordinary whiteness everywhere reflected its clear radiance. I faced it and the tenant of the Manor.

"*You!* Good gracious, Mr. Tarquin! . . . fancy making your way through all this snow!"

"The road is almost clear," he said, "and someone had made a path round to the back of your house. I thought I must come in and see how you've been getting on? I don't remember such a snow-storm since I came here."

I asked him in, and he followed me to the kitchen, after shaking the snow off his boots.

"How cosy it is. Is this where you sit?"

"Sometimes," I said. "It depends on my father. If he is—supposed to be—writing, he likes to be left to himself, so I remain here."

"May I do the same?"

"Certainly, if you wish, but take off that heavy coat while you're in such a warm room."

He began to unbutton his overcoat. I watched him, and then suddenly I said: "I'm so glad you've come. I wanted to know if your father managed to get off yesterday? I was thinking of him all day, wondering how he would get to the station—"

Tarquin paused in the act of loosening a button and looked at me with a sort of puzzled amazement.

"My father! . . . But he hasn't been here to my knowledge. He was to have come, but as he didn't turn up I put it down to the weather. And his boat sailed to-day," he added.

It was my turn to look puzzled.

"I know it did. He told me."

"Told you! . . . When did you see him?"

"Two evenings ago. He came in just about tea-time. Four o'clock. He had tea with us. Then the storm came on, but as he insisted on going to see you I sent Pat with him and a lantern."

"But how extraordinary! He has not been to see me. No one came in that evening, or yesterday."

I felt alarmed.

"But I assure you he went away from here to the Farm. Pat returned with the lantern, a little after nine, and said he had left him at your gate."

"Impossible! Where is Pat? I must see him at once!" He seized his hat.

"Shall we go round to Mrs. Malone's?"

"If you don't mind? I feel very uneasy."

So did I.

I unhooked my thick coat from its peg. "I'll just tell father," I said. "We'll go the front way."

We turned into the passage. Boris had followed us. I opened the door of the parlour.

"Dad!"

He was snoozing comfortably before the fire. He turned reproachful eyes to the doorway. Hurriedly I explained. "Mr. Tarquin says his father did *not* come to the Manor Farm last Friday. He had no idea that he was in Clanditch at all!"

"What! . . . Dear me, this is very strange. . . . Tell me again."

He stood up, wide awake, staring at Tarquin.

He repeated what I had said.

"But—that's absurd! Excuse me, but I mean he sat here for an hour or more. He had tea with us. He left to go to you. My daughter insisted on that Irish lad going with him, and taking a lantern. . . . You say he did not arrive?"

"No one arrived on Friday evening!"

"But . . . good God! how extraordinary. . . . What's happened? Did he change his mind, perhaps, and take the train to Oxford?"

"I don't know. I must see that boy," said Tarquin uneasily.

"Yes . . . yes, of course. But he went to the Farm. My daughter said so."

"He told me he had taken Mr. Marsyas as far as the gates," I said.

"There! If your father got so far he was safe. I mean h couldn't have lost his way or met with an accident?"

"Well, let us hear what Pat has to say!" I urged.

So we went down our own garden path and into Mrs. Malone' little plot that has been halved with some other tenant. Ther was light enough to-night to see our way. I knocked at th front door. After a moment it was opened. Mrs. Malon stood there.

"May we come in? I want to see Pat." I said quickly.

"Come in, is it? But I don't know if the boy's awake He's been that quare this evening. A touch of the feve on him."

She was leading the way to the kitchen as she spoke. W followed.

Muffled up in an old blanket and sitting in a shabby ol armchair by the fire was Pat.

The atmosphere of the place was close and unpleasant I was not surprised that the boy felt feverish.

She offered a chair but I refused. Tarquin went up to Pat

The blanket showed a tousled head and flushed face. A pai of cross eyes looked furtively at us from swollen lids.

"Pat Malone, aren't you?"

"Of course he is," chimed in his mother. "And ye knowin it as well as meself."

"He might be anything, or anybody, muffled up like that," said Tarquin. "Well, boy, listen to me. I hear you accom panied my father to my house on Friday night. It was dar and stormy, and Miss Gayle sent you with a lantern to sho the way. Isn't that so?"

The boy nodded.

"You took the lantern, and you said you went with m father up to my gates? Which gates——"

"Thim big ones—at the front."

"They were locked. I never use them."

"How could I be knowin' that?"

"I thought everyone knew it. Well, did you leave m father at the gates?"

"I did."

"And did he try them to see if he could get in?"

"He might and he mightn't. I wasn't waitin' to see.

"You went off and left him standing there?"

"That same."

"Why didn't you wait to see if he could get in?"

" And the snow comin' down, and meself miles from shelter ! Why would I be botherin' any more once he was at the Farm ? "

" I can't understand it ! "

Tarquin stepped back a pace or two and looked at me, and I looked at him.

Mrs. Malone hoped we were satisfied that the poor, sick child had done his duty ?

Then we told her of the old man's disappearance. He had not come up to the house by the side gate. There had been no summons from the outer bell.

It all sounded very strange. There was, of course, the theory that he might have changed his mind. Another quarter of an hour's walk would have brought him to the station. But in such weather it seemed unlikely he would have pursued his journey. Besides, he had told us he intended staying the night at the Manor Farm.

" I can't make it out ! "

I looked at his perturbed, anxious face. Then suddenly I remembered those papers. The envelope containing them still lay on the mantelpiece of our parlour.

I touched his arm. He looked questioningly down at me.

" Come in and talk it over with Dad," I said. " There are some papers that he—that your father dropped. . . . Perhaps they may throw some light on the subject ? "

" Papers ?"

He glanced again at the huddled figure. At Mrs. Malone's anxious, shrewd face.

" Ye can't be puttin' the blame on the poor child," she said pathetically. " Sure, he did as he was tould, and the bad cold he's had since that night, and now a fever with the pain and inflammation that's in his hand. Swollen as big as two it is ! "

" What's the matter with his hand ? " asked Tarquin sharply.

" It's nothin'. . . . I'm not mindin' it," muttered the boy. " Just where I struck it against the ould fence. . . . Give ye over, mother, makin' so much av it ! "

" Is it I makin' the fuss ! Sure, ye've bin cryin' and moanin' the whole blessed day ! "

" May I see ? "

Tarquin went up to him again. The boy reluctantly thrust out a poulticed hand, tied up in a dirty cotton handkerchief.

" Take that off—— "

Mrs. Malone grumbled but obeyed. The poultice, when

removed, showed us a red and swollen hand. Near the thumb was a jagged scar of unhealed flesh.

"You ought to let the doctor see it," said Tarquin. "I suppose you never thought of bathing the hand? Cleaning it thoroughly before poulticing?"

"I did . . . beautiful and clean it was, and healin' grand till this mornin'."

"Well, I don't like the look of it. The skin is all shiny and hard round that wound. You say you knocked your hand against the fence, Pat?"

The boy gave a sulky nod. "It would be a pity an' ye didn't try and make out I was the fool to do it!"

"After, or before you left my father?" asked Tarquin.

"After it was, whin I was tryin' to find the short way home."

"I'll look in on Dr. Morse on my way back and ask him to see to this," said Tarquin. "You're insured, I suppose?"

"I am; bad cess to thim moitherin' ould govermints!" interposed Mrs. Malone.

"Well, you can have free attendance and treatment. So the government is of some use. And get the boy to bed . . . He looks feverish."

Then we left mother and son to discuss matters and returned to my dwelling. Dad came out to the front door the moment he heard me open it.

"Well. . . . Any news?"

"None," answered Tarquin. "It is most extraordinary. The boy says he took my father to the main gates, and there left him. Those gates I never use. He couldn't have got in that way. But Pat seems to have gone off in a hurry, never troubling as to whether he found the other entrance."

We all three stood in the lamplit parlour; each trying for a solution to the puzzle. Then I remembered the envelope. I went to the chimney-piece.

"Here," I said, "are those papers Mr. Marsyas must have let fall out of his pocket. Father picked them up after he had gone."

Tarquin took the envelope. I had not fastened it. He drew out the pages of figures and scanned them rapidly.

"Is it his writing?" I asked.

"Yes." He turned to the last page; the half-torn letter.

He glanced at it. I saw his face change. The healthy tan grew ashen grey. He crushed the papers together, and put them into his overcoat pocket.

Boris, who had not followed us to Mrs. Malone's, came suddenly up and sniffed at the pocket, then lifted his head and gave that long melancholy howl.

We all started.

Tarquin spoke to him roughly, and the dog lay down on the rug.

"That's just what he did on Friday night!" I exclaimed.

Dad looked uneasy. Tarquin moved restlessly to the door.

"I must be going," he said. "I'll send a telegram to-morrow to the steamship people. If he hasn't missed his passage then our anxiety is over."

"You don't think there could have been an accident?" I said nervously. "If he had fallen down, or got faint or something; and then the snow . . ."

"It is deep enough in the garden to bury an elephant. But why should he have gone into the garden?"

"You'll search?" said Dad.

"Of course. I'll get one of my men to help. He lives in the village."

"Have you got your bicycle?" I asked.

"Yes; it's at the back door. I'll bring it round."

He went off through the kitchen. Dad and I waited at the front door to say good-bye. He came quickly back, wheeling the machine to our front entrance.

"You'll let us know in the morning? We shall be so anxious," said father.

"Yes; I'll let you know. It's all most extraordinary!"

We agreed. It certainly needed some explanation.

Ten o'clock.

Dad and I have talked of nothing else to-night but the disappearance of the Patriarch.

He had certainly reached the Farm, yet he seemed to have changed his mind about that visit in some unaccountable way. Had there been an accident? Had he fallen down, or struck his head against something in the darkness and lain there till the heavy snow had buried him into unconsciousness? But even then, he would have been found when the front path was cleared.

"Unless he had missed his way," I suggested. "Pat had no business to leave him without a light."

And so the discussion went on. To and fro. Endless theories. We could settle to nothing.

I have written it all down. The most exciting event since we came to Silverhatch. I hope it does not forebode a tragedy.

I have tried to recall every incident of that night. The odd, unexpected visit of the Patriarch. His talk about the Manor Farm. The papers he had dropped. His determination to see his son that night.

Yet the meeting had never taken place.

What had happened after the Irish boy had left him?

I knew little of the district—of whether crime or disaster had ever signalised it. I do not remember having seen a policeman, or a police station nearer than Bampton. There may have been some loafer or tramp ready to commit robbery, if occasion offered. The old man had had money on him. I had seen a packet of notes in his pocket-book when he took it out for a moment.

Oh! Imagination is running riot in me to-night. I can picture nothing but horrors. Dad has shared my uneasiness. He could settle to nothing. The sight of that armchair opposite his own took on the picture of a venerable occupant. Neither of us liked to look at it. Yet we did. . . .

In spite of telling each other that "of course it will be all right." "Some quite natural explanation will follow with the morning"—I'm sure neither of us quite believe in such explanation.

One more entry and I close for the night.

I had gone to the door to look out. The moon was still clear. A white radiance of light and snow still marked the shadowed world around me. And everything was weirdly, strangely still.

No sound. No wind. Even the cold had lessened. Perhaps the thaw would be here by morning, and the roads and fields once more passable.

My eyes fell then on the dog's kennel. I started, remembering that I had not seen Boris since Tarquin left.

I called and whistled.

There was no response.

I went back to the parlour. He was not there, nor in either of the bedrooms.

"I think he must have followed Mr. Tarquin," I told Dad.

He said it was highly probable. Yet we had not seen him leave the room, or the house.

"Don't worry. He'll find his way back, or else stay the night at the Farm."

So said Dad, making ready for bed, and anxious for me to follow his example.

I suppose I must. And there is nothing more to write about . . . so *au revoir!*

XII

Next Day.

I WOKE this morning to the sound of lashing rain against my window.

I lit a match and glanced at my watch. Six o'clock.

With a sleepy yawn and a sigh of regret for the comfort of blankets and eider-down I got out of bed. My *first* toilette these mornings is apt to be hurried. I just fling myself into necessary garments, pull on my thickest boots, roll up my hair under a tam-o'-shanter, and start off to the kitchen to boil the water for the hot mash.

This morning, as I waited on delay of the kettle, my thoughts flew back to the troubles of last night.

What had been discovered? How long before I should hear any news? The postman never arrived before nine o'clock. Papers came mid-day. A farm boy brought me the milk, but since this snowfall none had been sent. Therefore, as far as the outside world was concerned, I had no chance of news for hours to come.

I prepared the meal, and with the pail in my hand set forth for the hen houses.

Rain was falling heavily. A leaden sky held the departing moon. The silvery haze of the previous night had vanished. The snow was melting and the path which had been made for me now represented a muddy rivulet through which I had to wade.

"If Kit could see me!" I thought, and for once I must acknowledge the weakness of envy. A picture of her amidst sunshine and flowers of the *côte d'azur* flashed to my mind. Lucky girl, lucky people who had still money left to enjoy life, and indulge in luxuries! Well—it was no use to grumble. Work had to be done.

I plodded along. I gave greeting to my clamorous flock, I even left their doors open if they chose to peradventure forth after being shut up so long. It was not so cold, but the damp moist air drenched my cap and turned my hair to the consistency of seaweed.

Back again I trudged in darkness and gloom.

I had fires to light; breakfast to prepare; Dad's shaving-water to take up. (I was trying to persuade him to grow a beard. A nice little pointed thing like King Edward's used to be. It would save such a lot of time and trouble. But he had a fancy to be clean-shaven.)

I had just got the parlour ready when I heard steps in the passage. The voice of Mrs. Malone demanding where I was? I hurried out. Her eyes were red with crying. Her appearance bespoke trouble.

"Miss Shirley, dear, 'tis the sad day this is. My boy . . . me poor Pat——"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"The doctor was there last night, same as Mr. Marsyas promised, and he says he must go to the Infirmary. They're feared he'll lose his hand."

"Lose it . . . do you mean . . ."

"One of thim dirty operations. Yes, 'tis that . . . or, or worse." She sobbed heart-brokenly. "They'll send for him at eight o'clock. I came to tell ye."

I murmured sympathy. I did not like to say that had she thoroughly cleansed and bathed the wound this might not have happened.

"They'll be for cuttin' off his hand," she moaned. "The right it is, and now who'll there be to help me, or to earn thim few odd shillings as kape us from the workhouse!"

I bade her hope for the best. "Did the doctor *say* he'd lose his hand?" I asked.

"He did not. But I could see that was in his mind. God and the Holy Mother protect us! The misfortunes of me life would never seem to be endin'."

(I made her a cup of tea, as the kettle was now boiling, and let her pour forth her woes in the anticipatory fashion beloved of her race. In my own mind I thought it was a very good thing for Pat that he should go to the Infirmary. There would be cleanliness and decency and wholesome food for him, as well as proper attention to his wounded hand.)

I went back with her to have a look at the boy. He seemed very much worse. He was feverish and incoherent, and his arm was inflamed right up to the shoulder.

She gave him a little warm milk. Then he closed his eyes and lay in a sort of stupor. I was obliged to return to my duties, but I said I would come round when the ambulance arrived.

It was barely eight o'clock when a ring at the front door brought me out from the kitchen.

I confronted a red-faced portly individual in policeman's uniform. He touched his helmet. "Miss Gayle?" he questioned in a strong west country accent.

I said I was that person.

"I've had to call round. There's a . . . there's something happened at th' old Farm yonder. May I step inside?"

I led him into the parlour. He removed his helmet and took out a note-book. I waited, feeling suddenly cold and sick, as if trouble were at hand.

"I must ask ee a few questions, miss. You live here?"

"Yes. I and my father."

"I'd like to see him, too——"

"Shall I call him?"

He looked round the room. At the blazing fire. The breakfast-table awaiting its usual supplies. The chairs; the window.

"Not th' moment," he said. "I'll be questionin' of you first."

He examined his notes. "From information received I went to the Manor Farm, Clanditch, on the night of eleventh December ultimo. Theer I found some parties (as later named) as had been diggin' and shovelin' the snow that had fallen for twenty-four hours prevous. Said parties informed me as havin' been called to work by Mr. Tarquin Marsyas, tenant-owner of said Manor Farm, they had been a-shovellin' of the said snow at varyious pints of the grounds. With them was a dog, once trained by aforesaid young Mr. Tarquin Marsyas, and havin' accompanyed him in this speeshul evening, from house o' present owner. Name o' Gayle. Said dog manifested great onasiness and was scrapin' and holloerin' at the snow in one corner, off a side path. There—near some holly bushes they struck summat hard. Havin' lanterns and likewise bein' moonlit, they worked and dug and found a body. . . . Body of elderly man. Same body was there on th' spot identi-

fayed by the tenant of the Farm as bein' that of his father, one Mr. Alexyus Marsyas, well-known in these parts. Not aware o' circumstances of the law as by statue ordayned, the said diggers and snow-scrapers fetched out th' body from where it lay, and carried it forthwith into th' house. Said body was frozen stiff and deceased. Said body were then taken to a bedroom and layed upon a bed, and medical assistance was summoned. I bein' th' local authority o' this village were likewise demanded. So I came round on my bicycle, and heer'd o' this occurrence. Statements o' the owner o' th' Manor Farm—likewise the finders o' deceased corpse—were tuk. Such statements implicate one Mr. and Miss Gayle as bein' last persons where deceased was visitin'; likewise one Patrick Malone, otherwise Pat, livin' next door, and bein' an errand boy employed by the parties Gayle aforesaid."

"I calls at next door," he added, closing his note-book, "but the youth was ill and about to be removed to th' Infirmary. So no evidence to be there subtracted. Then I come here. Bungalow, named Silverhatch. Now if yew please, Miss Gayle, I should like a few particulars respectin' visit o' deceased. Also time o' his leavin' this domersile. In what state o' health, and mind, and if seemin' as usual when he set forth for th' said Farm?"

I was trying to grasp facts. Trying to picture the accident. *Death.* That frozen silence. All those hours the poor old man had lain there—helpless. And his son so near. What a tragedy!

I told my story in a few brief words, and saw it added to the notes. Then I called Dad. He was dressed now, and came down expecting breakfast. The sight of a policeman instead was something of a shock.

The story was repeated for his benefit. Like myself, he could only state what we knew of the old man's visit and departure.

I supplemented this information by giving the time of Pat's arrival home. Later, his confession that he had left the old gentleman at the main gates, instead of conducting him to the usual entrance.

All this the policeman put down in his note-book. Then he told us there would have to be a coroner's inquest, and that we would be summoned as witnesses.

* * * * *

I have got through this dreary day somehow. The hours seemed endless. I had no one to speak to but Dad. He, too, was very much upset by it all.

No word came from the Manor Farm. Mrs. Malone had not returned from the Infirmary. I looked out at the drizzling rain, the melting snow, my draggle-tailed poultry, and wondered if I could have lighted upon a more desolate place!

That Night.

Just after dark Policeman Marlott came round again. He produced the note-book. It was now full to bursting point. I think this must have been his first "case."

"I'm come round to say as how the Crowner will hold th' inquest day after to-morrow—noon," he informed Dad. "You're requested as witness, likewise your daughter. It's a bit misfortunate that that lad who took th' old gentleman from this domersile to the Manor Farm isn't in a fit state o' health to bear witness. But his evidence was taken as given—by his mother; likewise by you, Miss Gayle. Not that there's any suspicion 'gainst th' lad. He did his best. The storm was to blame for what followed on afterwards. Th' Crowner's jury'll be called and they can't say otherwise than 'Accidental death.' The deceased must just 'a' fallen, and hit side o' head 'gainst they sharp stones, which accounts for bruises, and bein' onconscious-like, why the snow just overtook him. He must ha' died in his sleep like a lamb."

I thought "the Force" had somewhat mixed his metaphors, but I was too distressed to say much.

It seemed such an awful thing to have happened so close at hand; and with possibilities that seemed to hint it need *not* have happened.

How I wish I could see Tarquin! But I suppose there is no chance of his coming round till after the inquest and funeral.

As I write this there suddenly flashes into my mind the thought that now he will be undisputed owner of the Manor Farm. He is the only son of old "Melchizedek." He must, naturally, be the sole heir to his property. "Out of evil—good." It is a not inappropriate proverb to fit in with that possessive love and longing for his land so characteristic of our Tarquinius Superbus. He loved every stony acre on which he had worked so determinedly. He loved the old house and what it stood for in point of age and history. Well, now no one could dispossess him of either as long as he chose to make them his own abiding place.

Next Day.

Mrs. Malone returned late last night. She had waited for the operation, and until the boy had come out of the anæsthetic. They had spared the hand, but removed the thumb.

She made the worst of it, of course, despite my attempts to prove that a thumbless hand might still be useful. Four fingers were better than none.

From the misfortune to Pat she dashed into a recital of this other tragedy. "They're sayin' the inquest may have to be postponed for Pat's evidence," she told me. "He bein' the most important witness and the last, as far as we're knowin', who saw the poor ould man alive."

"I understood that Pat s evidence was taken before they operated on him?"

"It was; and we thinkin' it's all over. But there was papers found on the ould gintleman, and a lawyer's address. In London, that was, and the police they sint him wurrd o' the accident. Thin he teleyphones, as they calls it, to the hospital, and I was axed to answer some questions. But I would not put me mouth to the quare onnatral machine. So one o' they hussies o' nurses, she said she'd spake for me. Anyways, the lawful gintleman comes down for the inquest, and the hospital people, they sez to me, 'Your son's the most important witness, and if they want him they'll have to perspone until he's able to git up and attend the Court.'"

She wiped a heated brow, having recited all this rapidly and incoherently. Then she rose to return to her own quarters. "I'll slape like the dead, I'm that tired," she said. At the outer door she paused. Turned to me again.

"Did ye know your dog was sittin' there beyant, beside his kennel? All wet and shiverin', the crayture!"

"Boris? I didn't know he had come back!"

I rushed to the back door, and called. Wet and shaking, with head bent down in apology for truant behaviour, my faithless "wolf hound" crept in. I had no heart to scold, I was so glad to see him again. I patted his wet head, and then brought out a rough towel and dried him before the fire. Dear prodigal! He offered his paw again and again. His great wistful eyes said, "I'm sorry, but you know I *had* to go."

So I shook the paw and murmured, "Yes, yes, Boris, I understand . . . and but for you they might still be seeking."

I heard my voice tail off in weak conclusion.

How on earth had the old man got to such an out-of-the-way spot as that where his body was discovered? Not on any path; not on the way to the house, front or back. . . . "Under some holly bushes," policeman Marlott had said. An unlikely spot, and one where they would not have been searching but for the dog. If only he could have spoken!

When he was dried and fed I took him to see Dad. I mentioned his services in that discovery.

"And he's been staying at the Manor ever since?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm glad of that. He'll have been some sort of company for our poor Tarquinius. . . . All this happening, and he—alone—in that melancholy old house."

"Is the—is his father—"

I nodded. "Yes, and the inquest will be held there, in that big room where we had tea. At least the first enquiry. Mrs. Malone seems to think that there will be an adjournment on account of Pat. He was the last—with him."

"The case is so purely one of accident," said Dad pettishly; "there ought to be no postponement. But these provincial officials are always so eager to minister to their own importance. Our local Dogberry, for instance. Did you ever hear such nonsense as his 'notes of evidence'?"

"But he had to take notes, and he has to give evidence."

Then I related the latest news which Mrs. Malone had contributed. A London solicitor would be down and superintending the inquest. We might be quite sure that meant a searching enquiry, a lot of official worrying.

Dad groaned. "I came here for peace. . . . I only ask to be let alone, left to my own pursuits, my own interests. And I find myself in the midst of horrors! A tragedy. A common inquest. Forced to give evidence. Bothered for insignificant details; things one never notices. 'Was deceased wearing gloves?' . . . 'How many buttons had he on his coat?' . . . Why, even that little accident of the papers—"

"I gave them to his son. They've nothing to do with your evidence. I've heard a witness need only answer questions, never volunteer information."

Dad made an irrelevant and not too polite rejoinder in which my grandmother and senile ignorance figured as details.

It was then close on ten o'clock, so I suggested bed, and shut Boris into the kitchen for the night. The wind was rising

again. The rain still fell. I wondered when the weather would improve. Dad so hated rain. I did not love it. But I was learning to ignore dislikes and prejudices.

The uselessness of pitting one's poor self-importance against the ever-accumulating facts of life was one of the lessons life was teaching me.

* * * * *

Two days since I wrote up my diary. Two queer, disjointed, worrying days.

Let me try to put down their details.

First. *The inquest.*

A strange sight to me. Twelve men sitting at a long table in that beautiful old hall of the Farm and, at the head of the table, the coroner, Dr. Plymm, an old, peevish-looking man, who was suffering from a bad cold, and emphasised sharp questions with loud sneezes. The London solicitor watched the case. Tarquin sat beside him. Dad and I and Mrs. Malone, and the men who had found the body in the snow, were the chief witnesses.

The jury had been taken to " view " what lay in the bedroom upstairs.

Then the coroner related the facts in brief.

The old gentleman had come to bid his son farewell before starting on a voyage to S. America. On his arrival at Clanditch he dropped in on some friends (Dad and myself) for a chat and a cup of tea. The storm came on, but in spite of his friends' entreaties he insisted on going on to the Farm. The young lady who would presently be called as witness, insisted that he should have an escort, and provided not only that but a lighted lantern to show the way. This guide, a boy from the next cottage, returned soon after nine o'clock with the lantern and informed the young lady that he had left the gentleman at the main entrance to the Manor Farm. From that hour all was mystery. Mr. Tarquin Marsyas, son of the deceased and tenant of the Farm, received no visit from his father, although he had had an intimation that such a visit was possible. There was a letter to that effect which the court would hear. As the night wore on the storm increased. A heavy snowfall blocked the roads and rendered traffic well-nigh impossible. Mr. Tarquin concluded that his father had changed his mind, and had not left London. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been out and about, and possibly have heard from his

neighbours at Silverhatch that his father had been there, and left to pay the promised visit. "Gentlemen of the jury, we all have the facts of this storm in our memories. We have not known its like for a score of years. What transpires of this unfortunate accident can only be supplied by imagining that the poor old gentleman wandered from one entrance to the other. For, according to the statement of the boy who acted as guide, he had been left at the main gates, which were never used and on this occasion seemingly locked. The boy had gone; the kindly lantern had gone. The belated traveller must have wandered or groped his way, trying to find the side entrance which meant the usual one. He did not find it. He seems to have got off the track and into a rough, stony bit of the grounds bordered by holly bushes. We must again imagine what there is no possible evidence to show. That he fell. In so doing scratching his face with the holly, and bruising the temples and side of his head with the sharp rough stones that lay there. If he recovered consciousness, or called for help, no one would have heard. And no one can say that he did. The most merciful conclusion to arrive at is that he lay there where he fell, in blissful unconsciousness of the terrible cold, the heavy falling snow. And death ensued. This, gentlemen of the jury, is the case I have to present to you. I will now call the various witnesses who can throw any light of information on the occurrence."

One after another they were called, and sworn, and gave evidence. Pat's was taken as a statement given at the hospital. Dad and I could only speak of that visit. The intention. The departure.

I was asked what time Pat had returned, and the coroner seemed to think he had taken a very long time over the journey. I spoke of the storm, which had increased, and against which the boy had to fight his way back.

Just as I was about to sit down again the London solicitor rose.

"May I ask the witness a question?" he said.

Permission being given, he turned to me.

"In the conversation with the deceased, was there any mention of a *special* reason for seeing his son?"

"No," I answered. "Only that he wished to say good-bye before starting on that voyage."

"And, during the discussion, did he allude to any difference of opinion . . . any—well, let us call it—disagreement—between the two, that necessitated a visit?"

My thoughts flashed back to those papers. I felt the colour rushing to my temples. Then I recalled my own advice to father.

("Witnesses need only *answer* questions.")

"No," I said firmly. "He merely mentioned that he wanted to see his son before leaving the country."

"Thank you."

I sat down.

The coroner looked sharply at my questioner.

"Do you wish us to suppose any such disagreement lying behind this visit?" he asked. "Were not father and son on good terms?"

The solicitor looked at Tarquin. His face was calm and impassive as ever.

"I think," said the legal gentleman, "that *that* is a question you had better put to the son."

It was put and met a denial.

But there came a sudden uncomfortable change in the smoothness of the enquiry. Just as a chance pebble may disturb the surface of a pool, so did that faint suggestion of a quarrel leave circle upon circle of unexplorable results. But the heavy bucolic minds of the jury were not capable of dealing with suggestion. They could only understand facts.

The facts of this case were summed up for them by the coroner. The visit to us; the departure under escort; the loss of landmarks; the accident and the death; a natural consequence of exposure.

The jury had seen the body. They had marked the disfiguring scars, results of falling on those sharp stones. Medical authority had opinioned death as due to exposure and cold following that fall. The witnesses could only prove identity, and relate facts arising from the visit to this neighbourhood.

Tarquin's evidence was brief; less important than either Dad's or mine.

He had reason to suppose his father *was* coming to see him, but no special time had been mentioned. The jury had seen a letter, and heard it sworn to as being in the handwriting of the deceased.

From the hour of its arrival he had heard or seen nothing of the old man until that discovery of the body . . . buried in the snow. How exactly the accident happened could only be surmised. . . . "Yes; papers and money were intact."

He could not, of course, say how much money his father had brought with him, but he supposed it would not be more than what his pocket-book had contained. Fifty pounds in notes, and in his purse some loose silver. Also the ticket for his passage; his passport and papers.

Asked by a juryman if his father knew his way about the farm, and could have found the entrance?—Witness said he knew it perfectly. He had often come there while staying at his bungalow; the one at present occupied by Mr. and Miss Gayle. He had recently sold it to them.

Then the coroner summed up. It was clear to everyone that this was a case of no complications. A straightforward verdict would answer the purpose, unless, of course, the "twelve good men" had any reason to suppose that death had *not* been the result of accident. But why suppose such a thing? It must have been due to that fall. Unconsciousness had supervened. A stupor of suffocation caused by the heavily-falling snow. Owing to the evidence of Miss Gayle they were able to place the time fairly correctly. The snow had begun at eight o'clock. By nine it was heavy enough to conceal anything. By next morning they all knew the roads and paths were impassable.

Mr. Tarquin Marsyas had given up all hopes of the expected visit. He had not left the house on the Saturday at all. He would have known nothing of the incident had he not gone over to the residence of Mr. and Miss Gayle on the next afternoon. When the young lady told him that his father had been to see them and he left with the intention of spending the night at the Manor Farm he had been amazed. "Discovery had meant this sad tragedy for which, and for the attendant bereavement, they must all convey their regrets"; and so on. . . .

The jury retired to another room. We waited patiently to hear the result.

Verdict, as we had expected. "*Accidental death.*"

No hesitation. No postponement. The case was closed.

Through the miry roads, in the chill grey afternoon light, Dad and I trudged back. We spoke little. We were, perhaps, thinking of the same thing.

Why had the London solicitor put that question to me? And why had Dad said nothing of those papers we had found?

XIII

Scraps from My Journal.

MONOTONOUS, dreary days.

My hours have been occupied with household duties; with poultry tending; with the endless "letting out" and "letting in" of the ever-busy fowls. They had almost ceased to lay, but the fact did not interfere with an enormous consumption of food.

I find myself thinking sometimes how very little the egg-eating public know about eggs! I mean, the feeding, housing, nesting, exercising, and general responsibility entailed by cultivation of the egg-producer.

Certainly it had never entered my head that poultry farming was as much a business to be understood as an amusement for idle hours and a few spare roods and perches of ground. That is to say, it had *not* entered it until I took up that business myself. Then I was overwhelmed with details.

You could buy a crate of birds by means of an order and a cheque. You could turn the contents of this crate loose upon a wired-in enclosure, and expect your purchase to lay eggs and hatch chickens *ad lib*. But you had to reckon with their own ideas of time and season! Their need of special houses and perches and nests. Above all, their food. Quantity and quality. (Many breeds are epicurean in taste!) Followed—other trifles. Exercise ground. Scratching shed. Dust baths. Hot meal at one time of day; loose grain, crusts, and disused bones and fat at another! The houses to be carefully cleaned; the perches scrubbed and "carbolicked"; the hay changed in the nests, and—most tiresome job of all—the birds to be occasionally what Tony called "dis-insected." This formula stood for liberal application of Izal, or an occasional sprinkle from hose-pipe or watering-can.

Fortunately for me I had the helpful Ganders to perform these unpleasant duties. But, were I a conscientious poultry-keeper, I would undertake them myself.

The one bright spot in this feathered landscape was Tony. His optimism and unfailing cheerfulness gave the fact of junior partnership a stimulus I sorely needed.

Yesterday he dashed up on his motor-bike, having peradventured the dreadful roads, and the more dreadful weather in a desire to cheer me up. I had not seen him since the Manor

Farm tragedy. He was full of sympathy, and not a little curious.

We sat by the kitchen fire, and I related all I knew of that sad occurrence.

The funeral was over. Dad had gone to it in company with the local doctor and the London solicitor.

Tarquin had buried his father in the old churchyard at Clerefields, from which fact I supposed the old gentleman had held Protestant tenets of faith. It had been a simple ceremony, with the farm men as bearers, and Tarquin chief mourner. No other relatives had appeared, nor did we know if any existed.

He had not been to see me since that night of the discovery.

The weather was still inclement. The snow lay in frozen patches, or half-thawed pools. A bitter north-easterly wind swept all this upland region, and made me glad to keep within doors, so it is not to be wondered at that Tony was unusually welcome, or that our tongues "clacked," as Dad called it, at record speed.

Just as he had risen for the third time to say he must be off, the back door opened and Mrs. Malone came into the kitchen looking very distressed.

"Sure, the bad luck's on me," she announced. "Ye'd wonder the craythure hadn't more sinse . . . but there 'tis, she won't go to the nest, and thim eggs chilled to death, and that ould villain av a cock trumpetin' up and down the yard as if 'twas proud he was o' the mischievan' that's happened to us!"

"But what *has* happened?" I asked.

"Why—I'm afther tellin' ye! Th' ould hin she's off the nest, and she won't go back, and there'll be no chicks at all for 'tis cold and dead they is by now!"

"Mrs. Waddles! . . . Do you mean she isn't sitting any more?"

"She is not," said Mrs. Malone gloomily. "And a good nestin' wasted. Six o' me finest eggs put to it. If there's a misfortune in this wurrld it's meself will be samplin' it!"

Tony and I regarded each other with the perplexity of godparents entangled by a family catastrophe.

"Exactly what it means, old thing, I've no idea," said my puzzled partner. "A hen sits. She gets tired of sitting, so she gets up! Well, why not? . . . Let her have a little gentle exercise, a bran mash, rub her down, and put her back in the stable. What?"

" Stable? Have sinse then! Me own beautiful kitchen and it free to her as long as she wished, and the food and the water wid me own two hands. Every attention!"

" I think hens have no sense of gratitude," said Tony. " And in my private opinion they're the greediest creatures on God's earth. The amount of food I've seen Miss Sherry here distribute o'er the Grampian hills to her un-frugal flock! And no reward. No chickens. No eggs—"

" Oh yes—there have been quite a lot of eggs," I said.

" Not the amount I calculated on. Each dozen hens should yield an average three eggs a day. Three times twelve, thirty-six. Well, we've started on about twenty-four dozen hens. Average yield. Two hundred eggs. There you are! Our Mr. Garth, the well-known ready-reckoner! His computation!"

" There's mills be turnin' quicker nor you can count," gasped Mrs. Malone. " But for power o' talk I'd back yer tongue any day, young Mr. Garth."

" And you'd probably win," said Tony. " Sure thing. Straight tip. Never known to fail, which reminds me. Our first Broody *has* failed. What's to be done with her?"

" There's nothin' can be done," said Mrs. Malone. " Just sind her back to the hin house beyant. She's too old for proper matin'. So you needn't be expectin' eggs either! It's to the pot I'd send her an' she was mine!"

" The pot! Sacrificial ceremonies! What says my partner?"

" No, no! I couldn't bear to have her killed. We'll let her go back and perhaps in the spring she'll mend her ways."

Mrs. Malone muttered that spring or summer, " 'twas all one wid they nonsensical creatures." She advised goats and a few pigs in their place, and departed still grumbling.

Tony and I laughed over the catastrophe and what he termed " our expected nursery."

" Still, she was a lady somewhat ripe in years for—expectations," he said. " Excuse farm-yard familiarities, partner. Nature knows no delicacies of meaning, however we disguise them by phraseology."

" You're very fond of alluding to partnership," I said. " Where is that deed or bond you were to bring for signature?"

" Ah—how remiss! Our Mr. Garth has such a poor memory."

" Tony, my dear," I said, " joking apart, you ought not to have paid in all that money—to Dad's account."

"Ought not? But, of course, I ought. My share. And not the full amount either."

"You have a hundred pounds' worth of poultry," I said, "and no money coming in as return."

"But it *will*. How often am I to tell you? By the spring we shall have 'em all sitting. Loads of eggs. Loads of chickens!"

"Not *both* at the same time," I reminded him.

"Isn't that possible? I thought in these days of patent hatcheries and electric incubators you could tumble the whole lot out as a joint manifestation of 'trap-nesting.'"

"If you assimilate your other studies as accurately as you do your poultry journals you'll be taking first-class honours," I said with fine sarcasm.

"Well, well, let us relegate the farm-yard to a back seat *pro tem.*, and talk of our poor old Superbus. He hasn't paid you a visit since?"

I said that Dad had seen him at the funeral, but he hadn't been here. Of course, there must have been a great deal to do. The lawyer from London had come down again and was staying at the Manor Farm.

Tony supposed the old gentleman had left everything to his son.

"Good old Torks will be quite a catch, won't he? Our local Amaryllis will be sporting on the green and throwing coy glances at young Corydon of fruitful acres."

I could give no opinion. After all, I knew very little of either father or son. And now the shadow of this recent tragedy overcast the relationship as well as its results. I imagined that the younger Marsyas cared much more for farm and lands than his father had ever done. He had conveyed that in recent conversations. But our casual intimacy had ceased with the abruptness of some unknown purpose. When or how it would be resumed I could not say.

After a week of bad weather the sun has once more shown itself. My poultry run is lively with released birds, and the air echoes to challenge or demand of the gay young cockerels.

Mrs. Waddles and Uncle Timothy have resumed normal habits and a few of the "Wyndiottes" are laying in unexpected regions. I do not qualify the statement, for if it is true that you "may bring a horse to the water yet not make him drink," it is equally true that you may furnish a hen with a comfortable

nest and she'll go and lay her eggs in a wood shed, or a potato sack!

Ganders still rendered me useful aid, as Pat had not returned from the hospital, and I was once more able to use my bicycle and have an occasional spin over the cleared and almost clean roads.

My discoveries in our district have in no way tended to increased neighbourliness. They seem very unsocial people, and their interests are bounded by their respective farms and the results. All are workers. I suppose the term "ladies and gentlemen" might apply to a special minority, but, judging from appearances (and conversations I have overheard), that minority would be hard to trace. No one has called on us. Not even that cleric who in country parishes usually does look up "the stranger in the land." Our avoidance of any church or chapel may account for this ignoring of our existence. Spiritually considered, we are *non est*. I do not think we are greatly troubled by such ostracism, nor inclined to plead that further axiom "*non sum qualis eram*" as sufficient reason for acquittal.

(*Note.*—This dropping into Latin quotation must be attributed to Dad's arguments with Tony respecting that young man's indifference to classics.)

Time speeds on, and Christmas is almost here. Nearly three months gone since I set up housekeeping and poultry management. I can hardly believe it as I look back.

In the midst of stoning raisins and grating breadcrumbs and cutting up mixed candied peel I throw my mind forward with the hopefulness of youth. "The winter will soon be over," I tell myself. "Just January to get through and then we shall have the fowls laying eggs by the hundred, and I shall get big cheques for them."

Against those big cheques I forget to array a long line of figures yclept "expenses." Food, houses, wire, coops. At times I am more hopeful than practical.

Later.

That business of making plum puddings was chiefly induced by Tony. He is staying on at his rooms and intends to come to us for Christmas Day festivities. Of what nature they will be I am quite ignorant. But no doubt that gay youth will supplement the occasion with his usual resource

Dad is asking Mr. Tarquin to join us. If he does I shall arrange a proper dinner. A thing not indulged in in these parts. A forgotten luxury to ourselves.

I inscribe here my menu with housewifely content. Soup. Roast chicken, stuffed with sausage-meat. Bread sauce. Vegetables. Mashed potatoes. Plum pudding. Mince pies, and "dessert *ad lib*." (Tony's description of the apples and nuts and *cosaques* which are to be supplied by him as a return.) We are putting him up for the night. I shall improvise that slip-room—which at present holds a bath and our boxes—into a dormitory.

Not yet have I seen or heard anything of Tarquinius Superbus. Every day I hoped to see that tall figure and dark grave face at the accustomed entrance. But he did not come. Nor have I caught sight of him in my walks or rides. I wonder if the Manor Farm and house are now indisputably his property? At the grocery store or the post office where most local gossip is disseminated I listen in hope of stray information. But the tragedy of old Melchizedek has had its little hour of fame, and is eclipsed by merely personal details of local life and happenings.

As it now wants but four days to Christmas, I think it is time to send our invitation. So I shall go over myself this afternoon with a note. If I see him I will ask the question; if not, leave the brief note to be answered.

Meanwhile, the plum pudding is boiling merrily on the stove, and Boris sniffs the rich scents of cookery with an approving glance.

He has stayed with me since that return. I wonder he, too, does not seek news of the Manor Farm?

XIV

More Scraps. December 21st.

I AM writing of this afternoon and its events—to-night.

Not that such trivialities merit the name of "events." But they pass my time very pleasantly.

I have forgotten to mention that that writing-table was chosen and sent up by Tony, according to my instructions, and

has given great satisfaction. It possesses two drawers, so Dad's papers are easily accommodated, and the dining-table —minus the extra leaf—is no longer requisitioned for an author's lucubrations! (These big words are Dad's fault!) As the said author professes to be writing every night up to supper time, I occupy myself with the same pursuit, in intervals of darning socks or repairing overalls. It shows the weakness of giving into a habit, for now the habit is almost a necessity. I mean I have grown to *think* all our trivial happenings into narrative form. From that to the mere pen-and-ink work of committing them to paper is but a step.

Perhaps I shall have made enough "steps" to represent quite a walk before I close this second journal. My first deals only with youth and school-days, interrupted by the disaster of the Great War.

My second . . . well, here it is; so far.

I set forth this afternoon as bearer of that invitation for Christmas Day. Boris, with his keen intuition, suspected where I was bound, and though I object to his following my bicycle, he insisted on doing so. It is hard work for a dog to keep up the necessary gallop, and he will not walk when his owner rides or cycles. However, Boris insisted on his powers of endurance, so I allowed him to follow me.

The roads were cleaner now. All sign of snow had vanished. I cycled past the fatal entrance where Pat had left his charge, and round and on to the side gates where I dismounted.

It was my first visit since the inquest.

The old housekeeper came to the door. She said her master was within. I followed her into that lovely old kitchen, with its blazing fire in the open grate, and air of homely comforts.

Tarquin was sitting at the table. Before him lay a mass of papers and documents. Boris and I apologised for disturbing him. He rose and welcomed us, saying he was glad of such disturbance.

"I hate business, and business documents," he went on. "But my father's affairs want a lot of clearing up. I suggest many evasions of the Gordian knot which would sever the difficulty, but a lawyer's mind has no use for the clear cut to an end. That only appeals to his client."

He looked at me with that rare half-humorous smile. "It *is* nice to see you again. I—I was thinking of you this morning. Wondering how you were getting on?"

I said poultry affairs were rather slack. I was looking forward to February for improvement.

"So am I," he said, and life and energy swept back to face and manner. "I long to see the good brown earth turned up by the plough, and the work of fields and farms stirring the countryside once more. I am hoping to add some fresh acres to my land; an outlying farm or two that have been neglected, but would repay cultivation."

That statement gave me courage to ask whether the Manor House property was now his? A curious *hard* look came over his face. His eyes fell on the papers he had been studying.

"My father left a will," he said. "But—he omitted to sign it. That is the point the legal mind and I are fighting. To me the matter is perfectly simple. There are no other heirs. No one, even as a legatee, is mentioned. If there were no will at all I should still inherit as next-of-kin. This fuss and delay are quite unnecessary. But I can't escape them."

"I suppose it's all that London lawyer?" I said.

"How do you know?"

"I was at the inquest. Don't you remember his questioning me?"

"I . . . I'm afraid I've forgotten details. It was all such a big tragic thing to have happened on the eve of his departure."

"In my own mind I blame Pat," I told him. "He ought to have brought your father right up to the door. Instead of that he goes to the wrong entrance, and leaves him to wander about in the dark, and with the snow falling . . . no wonder he lost his way!"

"He ought to have known it. He had come here often enough."

"I expect the storm confused him."

I then gave my message and invitation.

"To dine with you all—on Christmas night? But how kind to think of *me!* I shall be delighted, of course!"

"At seven o'clock," I said. "I hope it doesn't sound too fashionable, but I really want to go back to old days and old times for once."

"This is all a great change for you, I suppose? . . . The hard life, the work, the thousand and one things that perpetually crop up and demand attention. I wonder if you will get tired and throw it up?"

"Why should I?"

" So many do. Two or three years, and they sell the farm and stock and seek ' pastures new.' These houses change hands so often that one hardly knows who lives in them."

Boris was sitting close to him now, his head against his knee, his eyes fixed on the face he loved.

" That dog cares more for you than for me," I said. " By the way, was it true that he—"

I broke off abruptly. I had not meant to allude to that painful subject.

Tarquin looked at the dog. " That he—found my father? Yes. . . . He persisted in going to the spot and scratching away at the snow. One of the men followed and began to dig there. The result you know. "

" I—Dad and I were so awfully shocked. We had tried to persuade him to stay with us, but he would not. He said you expected him."

" I did, of course. But I knew the time of the train, and the bus, and felt sure he must have changed his mind. . . . Of course, the delay was accounted for by that visit to you."

We were silent for a moment. Our thoughts occupied with those " whys " and " wherefores " of any tragic happening which always point to possible avoidance until the tragedy *has* happened.

He asked me to have tea with him. I accepted.

Truth to tell, I liked Tarquinius immensely. He was a type of man I had never met. Strong and determined and full of purpose. I wondered sometimes how that " wobbling " semi-hypocritical old man could have sired a son so different from himself.

As we sat in that cosy old kitchen and he gave forth abrupt confidences I came nearer to understanding him than ever before. We grew quite friendly over our tea, and the dark shadow of recent happenings was banished by mutual consent.

I have come away with a distinct memory of projects set to early hopes of accomplishment. Tarquin had no fear of hard work ; gave no hint of faltering on the road to his ambition.

The cultivation and ownership of land seemed to him the one thing in life worth doing and possessing. Here, at thirty years of age, he found himself owner of an estate worthy of its granted possibilities. It seemed a relief to speak of them freely. I could only listen and wonder that mere land should teem with meanings so eloquent. That the banal facts of pasturage, dairy work, stable and poultry yard should determine a worker's manual

of knowledge, and be significant of a thousand meanings that only said " spring-time and harvest " to the ordinary reader.

The determination which stood for all he meant the Manor Farm to represent, impressed me more than the technicality of progress in store.

He alone would bear the brunt of failure, or the satisfaction of success. He would spare himself nothing, and exact from others the full meaning of labour, so that the old farm should once more be the landmark of the Manor's prosperity. So that house and lands should proclaim his ownership with something of his own pride in accomplishment.

" You seem as fond of the place as if you were one of the family," I said to him.

He answered that to found a family was as worthy an ambition as to perpetuate it. That set me wondering.

Tony's jest of " Amaryllis sporting on the green " recurred to me on my homeward way.

Perpetuating a family meant marriage ; children ; founding a home with an ostensible mistress.

Had our Superbus any such project in mind ?

With increase of land would come increase of prosperity. The Manor Farm would once more represent importance.

I looked back and looked over all those acres of pasture, and waiting fields. But the history of that old house meant a monument to the honour and glory of past generations. It seemed to me a strange ambition to build up a new family and a new heritage on such foundations.

" The old order changeth." . . . That was true enough. But the new—that was to take its place—had neither noble ancestry, nor knightly record, nor Royal Warrant as right of presentation. The Manor House could never live back the glories of its twenty generations. Though it might echo with pride what some long-deceased ancestor had said ; it was " a better thing to breed sheep than to hatch treason."

Well, Tarquinius Superbus would no doubt breed sheep and oxen and prize cattle, and farm scores of acres, and restore the ancient house and ancient rooms to something of their former beauty, but would that win for him the popularity that meant love ? The pride in squireship and lordship that had once been yielded to place and owner as their rightful due ? I feared not.

It struck me for the first time that I had never heard any hint of popularity respecting father or son.

In detached fragments of gossip, in the " hearsay evidence "

of Mrs. Malone, there had been no word of liking or esteem. For four years Tarquin Marsyas had lived and worked on that Manor Farm, yet, as far as he had confessed, he was friendless as ourselves.

In our case, with merely a three months' tenancy of a poor little poultry run and no outward evidence of prosperity, it was not surprising that we were left severely alone. But the Manor Farm meant the one important property in the district. It must surely mean also that its owner deserved recognition. Did the neighbourhood resent his foreign antecedents, or was it merely huffed by his stolid indifference to aught it said, did, or expected?

Perhaps Time would answer these questions for me? Perhaps that New Year, so near at hand, would mean an interest and a revelation? Perhaps I should have no need to regret the impulse that had brought me to this quaint out-of-the-world spot, and set me to work as never before to wrest victory from an unpromising venture?

Queer . . . what one writes when one's thoughts are given a loose rein!

XV

An Interval of Days.

With Christmas preparations and Tony as, what he called, a room-mate, I have not had much spare time. I had no desire he should know of my diarising habit, so I kept my papers well out of sight.

He certainly brought life and sunshine and interest into the house. To hear him argue with Dad over college rules and obligations was a liberal education to me on that all-important subject.

To begin with, the University *after* those four disastrous years was very different from the University before 1914. Demobilisation had sent back a crowd of survivors, and public schools had released a heavy stream of the New Youth who demanded a New System.

The old days, the old traditions, had ceased to be important.

There were clashings and wranglings and strenuous differences. There was outspoken rebellion against authority. Impatient manhood, released from public school discipline, or semi-militarised manhood fresh from camp of war and honours of trench life, met in those academical halls and faced life with a sudden hostility.

Reconstruction was as inevitable as the confusion it created.

A new Oxford faced the sheltered dons and intellectuals who had only known a strenuous peace, or dived into safe backwaters of æsthetic seclusion.

The prevailing element was restlessness. Classics and scholarships, political and economical problems, stood forth as considerations for wide discussion instead of passive acceptance. Nothing moved in the old way ; on the old lines. New blood had been infused into the derelict corpse of a deserted University. It stirred and woke and would not be conjured back to sleepy contentment.

Thus, for Tony as a freshman of only two terms' experience, to let loose his theories on Dad who was a Balliol man of the late " seventies," meant such a clash of opinions as spoke of antagonism.

Like all old 'varsity scholars, father opined that *his* times had been the great ones. Dignified by embryo political leaders ; writers ; statesmen ; legal luminaries. Such times, he averred, would never come again. All things serious, far-reaching, were treated with scant respect by the New Collegiates. Their political opinions were as wild as their mode of living. The rage for eccentricity had sounded the death knell of studious hours and college reputations.

Sports ranked far higher than classical honours in the estimation of the average three-year man, and such words as " Bolshevism, Communism, Socialism " replaced the good old Liberal war cry.

Tony Garth was a fair example of this vivacious youthfulness. He was certainly no student, and put no severe strain on his intellectual powers. Dad gave him sound advice to which he listened with commendable patience, but which, I felt sure, was wasted in any promise of acceptance. Still, as I said before, he had brought a new interest with him, and for two nights amused his host to the exclusion of his own literary labours.

My Christmas dinner was undoubtedly a success.

The table bore some resemblance to pre-war times, and our guests donned semi-evening dress. I was astonished when Tarquin appeared in dinner coat and white shirt. I hardly recognised him.

My own change of costume meant a severely plain-cut frock of dark blue velvet, to which Tony had added a spray of Christmas roses. I don't know when or how he procured them, but there they were on my plate on the breakfast table. Our Christmas gifts were somewhat simplified by the changed circumstances of our life. But they had signalised the occasion and that's enough about them.

And the dinner?

My share in its preparation was quite a success, and we felt no need of a parlour-maid even at the critical juncture of bringing in the plum pudding all alight.

I had feared the recent tragedy would have had its effect on our stranger guest. But, though grave and somewhat silent, he was in no way depressed, and Tony's jests and quips brought occasional smiles to his stern mouth.

When the meal was over and the table cleared we sat round the fire and talked, not of "cabbages and kings" but of changed conditions of life. It had come to looking back with fond regret on years that had pre-dated 1914. It was usual now to say "before the war" when alluding to prices and comparing incidents. We had not thought our homes so pleasant, our amusements so easy and inexpensive, our mode of living day in and year out so rational until we saw them ranged as contrast. Inaccessible as dreamland to this rude awakening. "Never Again" was the Peace record. Never to be as we had been; think, live, move in a calm atmosphere. Behind our years lay a great calamity. Before us loomed a terrible and ever-threatening doom. No single country in the world might say for itself, "I am safe." Behind, before, around, stretched tentacles of threats; omens of disaster.

Instead of a New World purified and hopeful arising out of the ashes of destruction, we who *thought* faced but blatant selfishness new-sprung from war's fierce levies. Greed and grab in office, in industry, in economic struggles for fortune wrung from a fellow-man's necessities, these marked the oncoming years. They made us loth to presage any good or better thing for that New Year so close at hand. Dad talked, and Tarquin talked, and Tony, strangely grave, spoke also of things heard and seen and memorialised now by names on those

college walls that had sent forth glad and hopeful youth to frightful and dishonouring death.

" For that's what it meant, all tosh aside. A flounder through mud and rain on a winter morning. The shrill scream of a shell, and then—dismembered bodies hurled pell-mell into eternal silence! A man of our college told me that. He's lost an arm, but it's the left, and he's going in for a tutorship. He had only been at Oxford two years before he joined up. They make something of a hero of him now; but, my word—when he talks. . . ."

Tony lit a fresh cigarette. There was a moment's silence. I spoke at last.

" One hardly knows if it's best to try and forget it all; to *try* and believe what the politicians and authorities told us, or else keep on fanning that fire of remembrance, and living beside its ashes, resolved they shall warn as well as warm our future years."

" The Hun will never change," said Dad, gloomily. He detested everything German and every German whose name had dishonoured for ever the false heroisms of war.

" Fritz is no sort of sport; he never was," said Tony. " His idea of fighting is only to murder the enemy by any brutal device, and keep his own skin safe. The blasted infamy of his poison gas. . . his infernal air-fleet; his, submarines! Ugh! Call *that* war! . . . Meet a man face to face, fight it out and let the best win. No, not your Fritz. He might get beaten. He might be killed. Better get at the other chap on the quiet, unbeknown, and settle him before he can turn and attack! That's been their tactics always. Why, even their clay-god Emperor hadn't the pluck to face the consequences of his devilish deeds."

" The curious thing about the German mentality is its inability to see its own unsoundness. The whole world has pointed a finger of scorn at their cowardly outrages, yet when that world gave them a chance to rehabilitate themselves, when they could have stood up and said: 'We *were* in the wrong, we'll do our best to atone'—they didn't take it. What confession did they make? Lies! Boasts! Bombast! Unrepentant still, and always. A world's menace now even as they were a world's disgrace then!"

Thus Tarquin. War-scarred himself; bitter with memories of wasted years and foolish blunderings. Never before had he spoken of the horrors he had faced, but to-night Dad's words

had lifted the curtain, and his eyes, following the gesture, kindled afresh to indignation and regret. So for an hour or more they discussed that subject; long laid aside between us two, but springing to its hydra-headed life of consequence at the first chance word.

* * * * * *

An End and a Beginning!

We say that at the close of every December, and the opening of every January. We said it at the False Dawn of Peace. We say it still, facing broken ideals and broken promises. The welter of strikes and unemployment. Ruined houses. Streets made horrible with ragged khaki, and battered figures of 'demobilised" soldiers. Promises unfulfilled. "What if going to be done?" we ask by light of what has been left hopelessly "undone." What better thing is in store for the New Youth born into this sad, old, blood-stained world?

For long after our guest had departed and Dad had gone to bed Tony and I sat on by a resurrected fire and talked of ourselves and our future. He purposed three years of college, and then to "look about." He spoke vaguely of a world tour, as exampled by England's young Prince. He would see what Canada was like; what S. Africa promised; what Australia held of hopefulness or fortune.

"And you, dear old thing?" he asked. "What are you up against? Somehow I don't see poultry-farming as a continuance. . . . *pro tem.* yes. Also means of amassing a useful competence; but after—later?"

I stared at the dull red coals. "Later? . . . Do you know, Tony, I never think *on*—nowadays. I dare not. I mean after what we have been through, it seems just enough to be alive. To have done with war news; air raids . . to have the peace of the country around one. Enough food and just to wait on what the day brings."

Solemnity descended on my partner.

"Then you're fortunate, for you are realising your ambitions. But you're young, my friend, you're young. Above all, you're a woman, and shall we say—not unattractive?"

"Spare my blushes!" I ejaculated.

"Certainly not unattractive," he went on. "And a household treasure for any man lucky enough to secure it."

He poked the fire scientifically and produced something like a flame.

"I may be wrong, but I could bet on evens that someone else holds that opinion also," he continued. "Certainly a modest hero. No Othello to boast of deeds and 'scapes; yet stamped withal by that seal of endurance which spells heroism in a woman's eyes."

"My dear Tony, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Why—of Superbus, of course! Now don't get the wind up and look fierce. If you didn't observe the silent homage of eyes—well, I did."

"What absolute nonsense!"

"A feminine disclaimer worthy of 1913. You girls think a man doesn't notice symptoms. That's your province. All the same he does. I'm talking plain common sense. Not often that our Mr. Garth indulges in such a pastime. But when he does you bet there's something in it."

"Our Mr. Garth would oblige by keeping his opinions to himself," I said curtly.

"You mean the personal touch? Sorry, if I've offended. Never mind, we'll let the spell work its way. And that reminds me. . . . Christmas and all. Would it be considered malapropos if one suggested a whiskey and splash? Of the former I possess a flask warranted pre-war, and charged to my account by a friend in Oxford. The latter—"

"Of course!" I jumped up and produced glasses and a syphon. He dived into his "cubicle" and returned with a fair-sized leather flask.

"You'll sample, too?" he urged. "Mild as new-mown milk. We'll sip the goblet to the tune of good wishes."

He poured out a stiff libation for himself. I checked a too generous hand and allowed the occasion to excuse an unusual indulgence—well "splashed."

"Happy days!" said Tony, raising his glass. "*Dum vivimus, vivamus!*"

I nodded and sipped and laughed. "May you live to greater industry," I said. "Opportunities don't offer any too often, and a 'varsity career is too good a thing to waste."

"Oh! I shan't waste mine. Next term I get rooms in the jolly old college instead of outside 'digs.' Some of its venerable qualifications will surely descend on my unworthy head. You know—or perhaps you don't—that the ancient Mertonite has a reputation for free speech and bold speculation. Methinks one Marcus Antonius Garth bears no small reputation in both lines. What was bold in 1268–1274 may well be bolder in

present disabled conditions. A promising career looms large on a speculative horizon. And hark ye, old thing, talking of college, wouldn't you like to go over some of them while the merry 'grads are away? They're open to the public now, and I would be honoured to play cicerone."

I considered the question. "I should like to see Christchurch, of course, and Magdalen and—yes, Balliol, on account of Dad."

"And Merton—on account of one Antonius Garth, and a few others out of respect of mouldiness and tradition? We must make a day or several days of it. I'm awfully bucked at getting rooms in Quad. Jolly nice set . . . the man got ill, and as it was his last term but one, nobly sacrificed the one in interests of a waiting list. So I stepped in, and have given my archdeacon notice. He was very grieved. I gave less trouble than most of the boarded-out young gentlemen, so he was pleased to say. Meantime, I'm having my new residence swept and garnished. I shall send in a few personal comforts which I want you to help choose. I've sampled some of the freshers' rooms. Simple decorations. Old prints; sundry pipes and tobacco jars. A couple of easy chairs; a table to feed at. Another for work and correspondence. Books, as a matter of appearance, but not strictly necessary, and a rug or two. The adjoining rest-chamber—item one iron bedstead fully equipped; one hanging cupboard; one chair. Owing to limitations of space ablutionary requirements supplied by bathroom and fitted basin. Modern additions hard to acquire, but the brave fellows of old insisted."

"Isn't Merton *the* oldest of all the colleges?" I asked.

"It is. I told you 1264, founded by one Walter de Merton, afterwards Bishop of Rochester. There's a lot more about it that one has to stodge, but at present this sufficeth in the way of information. You shall see it for yourself."

He tossed off the pre-war contribution, and nodded appreciatively. "What you lose by 'sipping'" he remonstrated. "But no woman possesses the convivial art. Margaret and Somerville conviviality is translated by cocoa in the small hours. Ugh!" His grimace was eloquent.

I said cocoa and coffee were better for women students than our present indulgence. He agreed it might be so and celebrated the agreement by another contribution from flask and "splash."

After that he waxed hilarious, so I suggested retirement.

He assured me earnestly that he had spent the most wholesome and happy Christmas of his life. " No social humbug, no stodgy courses, and no tips! Wondrous glorious feats! Here's to our next merry ' shepherd's watch.' "

He drained the glass; then he lit his candle and would have bidden me an unusually affectionate good-night had I not sternly forbidden it.

So we parted; I enjoining quietude as Dad's sleeping apartment was so close to our guest's improvised resting-place.

" Such a jolly little cubby-hole," he remarked approvingly. " Hope you'll ask me again—what? . . . You can't say I haven't been a good boy? Helping you buzz about and do the useful. Wonder what our priceless old Kit would have thought of us? I'm quite sure, between ourselves, she hadn't half such a good time. Now night-night, old thing. Call me in the morning and I'll help with the bran mash and early breakfast. So long! "

The door closed, and I went away to my own little " cubicle " with a sigh of relief that Christmas was over.

Yet, tired as I was, I could not sleep. The events of the past strange months, the new friendships, the total alteration in my mode of life marshalled themselves before me and persisted in marking time to the difference of daily existence. Would it continue on these lines? Should I find in employment content of mind and results as satisfactory? Tony seemed to think I should get tired of this experiment. The hard-working common sense of it might contrast too keenly with pre-war visions of a girl's life. Those fancies and romantic possibilities in which dawning womanhood indulged.

Well, I had had my dreams and seen them dispelled by the harsher horrors of those years in which life was shaken to its foundations by dread and death and threatened evils. I knew I could never go back to those dreams any more than I could go back to the merry thoughtlessness of the days which had fostered them. Even if my present experiment proved a failure, I should still crave an active out-of-doors existence. The life of parties and " at homes," of restaurant suppers and theatres and dances seemed strangely purposeless and foolish. The record of dead youth faced us on every hand. Memorialised in every village and hamlet. In every town. In the great university city beyond, where a Martyrs' Cross already raised itself in mute commemoration of other sacrificed lives.

Martyrdom, sacrifice, struggle—these the records of to-day as in past centuries. And for what? That life might still exist and hearts still break, and Heaven look on in unrelenting silence!

Just two words to end my Christmas entries. Two words and a sigh, as wind and darkness sweep their way to dawn. *Cui bono . . . Cui bono?*

PART II

I

New Year's Day.

THE "fragments that remained" of poor old December were of no special importance. Abominable weather; cold, rainy, altogether unpleasant.

The poultry yard presented a miserable draggled crew of birds. Eggs were few and far between. A grey sky for ever shredded with lowering clouds gave no hint of sunlight.

I worked on, in and out of the house. I did much sewing and patching of garments. I wrote letters, and read a little, and scribbled in my journal. Now, to-night, I greet a New Year with a strange hopelessness.

It may be due to a visit to Oxford. Hilary term begins in a fortnight. Tony wanted me to see his promised rooms, and also to look over the various colleges renowned as educational exploiters of manifold genius. So off we went. I was shown Christchurch and its wonderful "hall" and the Cathedral and the river walk. We passed on to Merton, old and gloomy as its own ancient muniment room of the 13th century. Merton College seemed to have more than its share of "Quads." There was the First, and the Mob, and the Fellows, and one named "Stubbins" for no reason that I could gather.

For my enlightenment Tony had jotted down various dates and points of interest. These he enumerated as we passed along under the wide Tudor arch with its arms of Henry VII. He showed me the Commons Room, once the apartment of Queen Henrietta Maria during Charles the First's residence in Oxford, and the Hall where students and Dons and Fellows dined. I learnt that the undergrads were expected to dine at least four times a week in their respective "halls," but could have any other meals in their own rooms.

With great pride he showed me his appointed "digs." A rather shabby sitting-room but with a pleasant outlook on the Gardens. Opening out of it a bedroom, not much larger than

a ship's cabin. There were quaint cupboards for china, or food, and he had provided a tea-set and kettle—for private use.

I was next introduced to his scout. The house servant. A dignified character, and full of information. I learnt his duties were to wait on seven sets of rooms and their owners. Clean them, light fires, bring hot water, get breakfasts, or any other meal save dinner. It seemed pretty hard work. He did not deny it, or that some of the " men " (they were all called *that*, it appeared) gave a good bit of trouble.

" And the worst is just as you get used to them off they go," he said, with a paternal glance at Tony.

I wondered whether he was going to " give trouble." He was much graver and less frivolous than of yore. He did mean to attend lectures, and had already arranged with his tutor for a course of reading in between the recreations afforded by games and clubs and debating circles.

He affected sorrow for the good old days of Verdant Green and Dr. Johnson. " All the same, those caps and gowns must have been an awful nuisance. A true Briton hates any sort of uniform (even khaki) as much as every foreigner delights in it."

I thought the University Town must have looked more like its name and meaning when students, and Dons, and Fellows alike were clad in flowing gown and mortar board. " There's nothing to distinguish them from the ordinary townsfolk now," I lamented.

For something of the dignity and wisdom and vast meaning of these great buildings had overwhelmed me as I looked at them. Each set in its green-spaced quadrangle ; windowed walls looking down on the peace below, or out to the wider area of playing fields and meadow, to where the moored barges were ranged in a long line of similitude.

I thought an undergraduate's life ought to be a very happy one. He was released from school discipline. He was comparatively his own master (under such restrictions as morality and good taste demanded). He had unlimited opportunities for useful friendships, for athletic exploits, for studious hours with every learned and illustrious authority the world had known and honoured. The ways of life as embodied by choice of career lay open before him. His—" to win success " if he chose and set his mind on doing so. Altogether an enviable individual.

Tony listened and agreed—" not so dusty." A form of slang ill-suited to our surroundings.

Happily, for me, we stumbled on a musty old professor who spoke to us in the kindly interests of opportunity. Hearing from Tony that he "belonged," he launched forth in praise of the College and of Walter de Merton, the original founder, to whom we owe Oxford as an asset of national education.

"Merton College," said our informant, "was the first expression of the academical idea, as apart from the Friars' schools. It started with twenty students, who were not friars or monks, and must not enter any of the regular orders. As an example of collegiate discipline under secular guidance, Merton College presented an entirely new conception. In time," continued our informant, "it became the model of all other collegiate foundations. Walter de Merton was twice Chancellor of England and finally Bishop of Rochester (1274). He then transferred the wardens, bailiffs, and ministers of the altar from Malden in Surrey to Oxford; henceforth to be the permanent home of its scholars. The statutes so wisely framed remained in force till the eighteenth century, the founder of Merton having removed paramount control from the religious to the secular orders. This system revolutionised university life in England. It was the true expression of collegiate discipline, laying claim on the loyalty and service of its members. To individual study was added community life; to private aims the idea of common good. Diversity of thought and training brought out diversity of character and ability. The students were united by a common interest; the power of independent thought; the advantages of knowledge, and the education of reason. Thus was formulated—and is still continued—the primary aim of English university education."

I listened with interest, Tony with interjectionary comments. For me a valuable cicerone meant to him "a snuffy old Don." So much for youth's respect for its teachers! Even the "Quads" suffered. The fourth being alluded to as "Stubbins." The "Mob" signified that dingy inner space in which was the library; why so-called no one knew. Then came the Fellows' Quadrangle with its beautiful gateway of mingled Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian order of architecture.

The Professor cavilled at the taste of the Victorian age. "Responsible," said he, "for those new additions of 1864. Modern art has painfully illustrated the dearth of the artistic faculty, and an ugly modern building has shouldered its way into the once beautiful enclosure of the Grove."

Much more I heard and saw and enjoyed before dusk threat-

ened, and Tony insisted on tea. He did not invite our guide, being, as he expressed, "thoroughly stodged with statistics for one day." But I thanked the old gentleman very warmly and said how much I had appreciated his information. He gave me his card and told me to let him know when I wanted to see any of the other colleges. When I mentioned Dad's name as of Balliol he was greatly interested. "You must bring him over here," he said, "and we'll have a chat. A pity you live so far." (I had informed him of that.) "You should stay in Oxford. Place of unending interests. Inexhaustible. Come again, and come soon."

I promised I would. Having started that fatal thing, "doing the colleges," I felt I could never rest till I had done them all. I told Tony I envied him. He seemed surprised.

Having viewed "Tom Tower" and the Faire Gate and the Great Quadrangle of Christchurch, having thoroughly "stodged" Merton, and wandered up the "High," and partaken of tea at the Mitre, he considered I had fulfilled all sight-seeing duties that Oxford demanded. As for the other colleges, one was very like another. "Same old quad; same old hall; same old chapel; same old common room. Only difference—age and size."

I upbraided his disrespect. "To have such opportunities, and such a wonderful place to live in and yet—fail in appreciation." No wonder aggrieved lecturers had formulated their displeasure.

> *"Yet here the rays of modern science spread,*
> *Professors are appointed, lectures read.*
> *If none attend or hear, not ours the blame,*
> *Theirs is the folly, and be theirs the shame!"*

"Where did you grub up that ancient lay?" he enquired.

I laughed. "I saw it in a book in your own library—as a quotation," I added. "But I suppose students, like history, repeat themselves. When you are brought to the bar of condemnation you'll be sorry."

"Sorry not to have grubbed among dead languages and prejudice!" he exclaimed. "That's all the place stands for. Nothing that would equip you for realities of life. That's the academic crime of centuries and, but for the knock on the head the sleepy old crew got in 1914, it would be its crime to-day."

"Red rag," I murmured, holding up a protesting hand.

To-day had awakened afresh the memory of that holocaust of England's glorious youth. I felt I could bear no more. So we dropped the subject.

Tony drove me back in the little Morris-Cowley. He knew every "short cut" by now, and we seemed to reach the Bungalow in a very short time. I asked him in, as I knew Dad liked a chat with him, and there was no reason to hurry back. The university town was dull enough in the off season, and his college chums were all scattered to their various families, or friends.

I told Dad of the old Professor and his message.

That made him reminiscent. He talked to Tony of his own "graduate days;" of the difference between then and now. "No reverence, less appreciation of advantages—such as scholarship and professorship."

Tony only smiled. "The Rhodes' chaps do all that," he said. "South Africa, India, America, Canada, have turned the university into a very different place from what it was in your time."

Dad tried to re-create that atmosphere. The first sense of liberty as a freshman. The formation of friendships destined to be a lasting influence. The awe with which new-comers regarded the established three-year man. The first Commem: the first appearance at Schools: the wholesome terror of exams: and *vivas*: the agonies of suspense as to whether a First or a Third was to reward the efforts of studious terms.

Tony interposed the cock-sureness of scholarship, arrived and overlooking new fields of enterprise. The modern graduate's sense of independence after prolonged discipline of public schools. The present-day cosmopolitan indifference to rank, or anything savouring of aristocratic attributes. That one was prospective heir to a dukedom meant nothing to one's particular Quad; very little save in matter of tips to one's scout. The Prince of Wales at Magdalen had lived just as an ordinary undergrad. Had dined in hall, and tenanted the same class of rooms as plain Mr. Tom Jones or William Smith. It all sounded very democratic and irreverent, but as Tony wound up, with exploiting of schoolday classics, "*Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.*"

An old saying indeed, but true to-day as when first uttered. Possibly even England's young Prince saw no more as he passed

under Tom Gate, or loitered in those shady meadows, or strolled by Cher, or Isis, than any of the hundreds of students who had passed into some historic Quad, or striven for their "blue" on the same historic waters!

Well, the day is over. Rather a memorable one. I picture Tony now, as he will be in those quaint old rooms, wandering to and fro the bare wooden staircases and dusky passages. What stories they held! What mingling of tragedy and mirth, hopes, ambitions, desires! Surely the ghosts of the past must haunt those grassy Quads; those re-tenanted rooms!

What nightmare revels might they hold now, that host of martyred lives, who had gone forth in their youth and strength and courage to face a foe unworthy of such sacrifice!

As I write the words I seem to see them marching from playing-field and meadow, from river barge and outrigger—cricket bat and oar and punting pole flung aside at a bugle's call, never to be taken up by the same hand again!

It sets one thinking of the mystery of life. Why should such things be? What purpose lies beyond the martyrdom, or atones for the sacrifice? Who, in this strange world of manifold meanings, shall ever dare affirm what in truth is Right and what in contra-distinction is Wrong?

I have gone through such times of disaster and humiliation that it is little wonder I feel their effects.

To-night it seems as if the splendour and glory of the England I had known were as colours painted out by Fate's relentless hand.

The severity of reverses sustained, the openly declared enmity of the world at large, the disturbance and unrest at home, the chicanery of governments, the false cries of political leaders, the whole tremendous trembling upheaval of past systems, faced me in my thoughts as they must face a million reasoning souls in this sad land.

A New Year has dawned. Press and people have alike hailed it as an omen of good things to come. The political air is rife with pie-crust promises; the leaders of opposing parties speak soothingly or diffidently of Budget relief. One hand gives that the other may take. We, who suffer the burden of taxation, know how heavy it is. Know too, as I know to-night, that the sacrifices we have made are of little use.

The change in my father's circumstances and mine face me

with a new responsibility. I must earn a joint livelihood. I must see the earnest, not the jest, of this simple undertaking. The glimmer of re-awakened ambition, stirred afresh by to-day's glimpse of a university career, must be again extinguished. Not for me the life of Somerville ; of lecture hall and classroom, and college curriculum. I must be content to drudge and work as once I had paid others to work for me. Books and study meant henceforth luxuries I had to avoid ; not the necessities of a coveted career.

No wonder it is in my heart to envy Tony !

II

More of my Journal—January 14th.

THE slow dark days drag along. Monotonous in their passage as in their uneventfulness.

I have read much of the " winter-laying-hen," but I don't seem to have collected her species as yet.

Mrs. Malone talks of great things to come with February, but I am a little disheartened by the unproductiveness of the two preceding months.

I had to practise severe economies for the household in order to supply the greedy demands of my feathered flock. I wonder sometimes if any living creature eats so much and so persistently as the domestic fowl ! From morning to night it is one incessant scrape, scratch, gobble. Nothing comes amiss to its appetite and assuredly eggs should spell the component parts of earth, air, and water. Grain, worms, seeds, insects, vegetables, meat scraps, all are devoured uncritically, and one would suppose all minister to the nutriment or fecundity demanded of results.

I regard my plump noisy birds with pardonable surprise. " You don't work, and you don't pay for your keep. Well, isn't it about time you gave your attention to family matters ? What about sitting ? "

One or two eyed me gloomily. I hailed any sign of " broodiness " with joy. Gladly would I provide coops and bring them necessary meals in their own apartments if only I could

dwell on the prospect of golden fluffy offspring. Healthy sittings.

I had little assistance nowadays from Pat Malone. He made the most of his operation, and according to his mother had never fully recovered from the "strange weakness in his limbs" that had been the result. But my invaluable Ganders never failed me He had cleaned and whitewashed and built and wired until my small property was quite a credit to ownership. Earnestly I longed for Spring. Some hint of green on bare brown branches; the scent and colour of blossoms in the orchards; the bloom of wild flowers in hedgerows and lanes. But on these wind-swept heights Spring was always late in coming, and heralded by constant visits from chill north-easters; the one wind I hated, and could never forgive Kingsley for praising. I should like to have set him here, and made him face open moorland and unsheltered roads while his falsely eulogised "zephyr" nipped his nose and slashed his face, and set his eyes streaming, and pierced to the marrow of his bones!

It is strange how rarely I see Tarquin in these days. He came once after the Christmas dinner; it was the day I had gone to Oxford, and he stayed for a few moments chatting to Dad. Since then he has not been near us, and I have only caught a distant glimpse of him working in one of his fields.

I wonder sometimes if the Manor Farm is his; if the old man's will had been accepted by legal authority despite its want of signature? Surely in the circumstances there would be no doubt as to the testator's intentions. Tarquin was his only son.

January 15th.

Odd, that last night I wrote the above entry respecting Tarquin and his inheritance. This afternoon we had a visit from the same legal gentleman who had come down for the inquest and funeral of the old man.

A disturbing visit.

I admitted him with some surprise. He asked to see Dad. I had to show him into the sitting-room and disturb a comfortable siesta.

He gave, as reason of his visit, a desire to see the lease on which we rented our little poultry farm.

"Lease!" I exclaimed. "But we have bought it—outright! There's no *lease!*"

He ignored me and looked at father.

"You have the deed of assignment, then? Title of estate, stamped and witnessed?"

"We have a—a—deed, that Mr. Marsyas gave us. It was arranged between ourselves."

"May I see it?"

"But why?" interposed Dad. "It was a matter, arranged as my daughter says. He drew out a form of 'title,' as you call it, saying he sold me this house and ground belonging to it for a certain sum: I paid him the money. He signed the deed. I believe it is stamped. I'm not sure. Is that why—"

"Why I ask to see it? Yes."

He had an unpleasant voice, and a sallow, sinister face. Altogether a most unprepossessing person.

"Yes," he repeated; "that is the reason. Mr. Marsyas was my client, and he knew perfectly well that in assigning any of his property, he should have allowed me to draw up the deeds. This purchase of yours is quite informal. It could not stand investigation in a court of law."

"But—who is going to question it?" I demanded.

He answered that *that* remained to be seen. He had the arrangement of his client's estate before handing over a complete title to the presumed heir. A great deal of Clanditch had belonged to the old man. He had bought land and farms, built and improved and acquired as the fancy took him. Some of the proceedings had been very irregular. Ours was an instance. As executor of the peculiar will (which had not been signed or proved) this Mr. Jassey—Gideon Jassey was on his card—must first satisfy himself that all tenures and tenancies and leases were in order.

Facing the inevitable, Dad produced his small deed-box and unearthed a sheet of blue foolscap which purported to make over the "poultry farm, and dwelling thereon known as Silverhatch in the hamlet of Clanditch, Oxon, to one John Harford Gayle for the sum of eight hundred pounds."

Simple enough. Clear enough one would think, if it were only possible to persuade the innate crookedness of a legal mind into a simple and direct path!

Mr. Gideon Jassey poured contempt on the simplicity of our transaction. He could see only muddled confusion in a clearly expressed meaning.

Dad waxed wrath and argued. I interposed with a question.

Who—would be inclined to dispossess us? If this property

belonged to the son of that 'testator,' I felt sure he would not question a deed of his father's providing?

"Possibly not," snapped the acrimonious voice of our visitor. "But certain formalities must be observed before that son can legally inherit. The estate must have guarantee that there is no other heir, or heirs; no outstanding claims. The will was very peculiar; very unsatisfactory. As it was unsigned, and unwitnessed, it could not stand as a legal instrument. An expression of the testator's desire—yes. But that expression had been qualified by a condition. It was in order to enforce that condition that the old man had come to Clanditch, in order to see his son. Unhappily, the accident of his death—"

(Here Mr. Gideon Jassey had paused and looked meaningly at us both. I returned the look. Dad was ruffling his hair in a perturbed fashion. He wished his unwelcome visitor at Jericho, I felt sure.)

"... *if it was an accident.*"

I started as I heard that sinister whisper.

"If! ... But, of course it must have been? That was proved at the inquest!"

Dad looked up at the sardonic face. "You are surely not questioning *that* fact?" he said. "There can be no shadow of doubt that it was an accident—"

The hateful man ignored the point, and proceeded to ask some queer questions respecting that visit to ourselves. What had the deceased said, exactly? Had he mentioned any difference of opinion, any quarrel with Mr. Tarquin? ... Had he spoken of letters, or *a* letter about which he was to interview him before departure for S. America?

These interrogations were answered by Dad. I maintained an indignant silence. But as I heard them I felt a sudden sense of fear. This man was no friend of Tarquin. He had no intention of rendering up authority and giving him an unquestioned right of heritage. Trouble was brewing. Something ominous lurked in the background of this visit and these questions. I felt it as surely as if he had told me in his own repellant words.

He said more. He expended a great deal of legal jargon on our unappreciative ears. When he rose to go he left behind him an uncomfortable sense of coming trouble. He had asked for Pat Malone's address, and I told him "next door." I wondered what he could want to see him for, until I recalled that Mrs. Malone's property might be also in dispute if any

question of legal possession arose. Why it should arise I could not tell. I felt certain that our Superbus would be the last man in the world to dispute rights of tenancy. He had, before this, hinted at his father's lax methods, but those methods applied to all the varied tenancies of this property. To question rights of one meant questioning rights of all. None of us were sure. I thought of the numerous poultry runs, the allotments and plots. Could they all be jeopardised by some interference of law? Surely Tarquin would not permit it!

I went back to Dad and asked him if he had not some law book dealing with rights of inheritance. He looked up his odd volumes and found one that dealt with the subject of "Wills," and how to execute them.

We did not gain very much comfort from this, as it dealt mainly with the care necessary in choice of executorship. This was our first handicap, for Mr. Gideon Jassey had said he was executor for the late "Melchizedek," and was justified in enquiring how he had let or assigned the various leases of his property.

The book stated that a testator could not be too careful in choice of his executor, who should possess "good business judgment, and be of unimpeachable honesty."

We looked at one another as I read this out. We knew nothing of Mr. Gideon Jassey's character, but that "Dr. Fell" instinct which he had inspired did not reassure our ignorance.

There were directions how to make a will; how to bequeath legacies or gifts; but everything was overburdened with technical phrases, and left one uncertain as to whether any desire on the part of the testator could ever be carried out!

However elaborate a will was, a codicil added could undo all that it had signified. Could create more confusion and allow of more legal interference with a desired object!

Our informant concluded with the remark that every will must be signed by the person making it. His name or "mark," if he cannot write. Also it must be signed by two independent witnesses, in the presence of the testator and *the presence of each other.*

Now, as far as we had heard, that will of Tarquin's father carried out none of these conditions. We could not, therefore, believe that this lawyer had any right to pose as its executor.

Old "Melchizedek" had told us that he had only one son. Therefore Tarquin was the legal heir to all his property whether there was a will or not.

That being the case, why had this hateful lawyer come here to trouble us about our property rights and question legal tenure of Silverhatch?

I felt rather terrified at the thought of dispossession. Of that deed of purchase being proved worthless. It would be largely my own fault. I had taken the old man's word for it that legal advice was unnecessary, and that the agreement he drew up answered all questions of sale and assignment.

Dad was a perfect babe in ignorance of business matters. They had never come his way, or interfered with his placid enjoyment of a literary life. He had trusted me to arrange our tenancy, and meekly signed the document at which Mr. Gideon Jassey had scoffed. Thus we stood, and our legal enquiries left us very much as we were before making them.

"The best thing to do," said Dad, "would be to ask Mr. Tarquin to come here and talk matters over. If the property comes to him, as I feel sure it must, he is not likely to turn us out. He knows I bought this place from his father, and have greatly improved it, and made it more valuable. (Oh, Dad!) This deed of agreement, or whatever it is called, makes me the owner, both of house and land acreage. I should certainly maintain my claim and yours, for, of course, I have settled it on you. That, and my life insurance, will keep you from absolute poverty should anything happen to me. You are strong and intelligent and capable. I feel sure you would be able to fight the battle of life for yourself. I confess I had hopes of your scheme giving me a few peaceful years before I said good-bye to a world that has never been very kind to me."

He sighed and put away the musty old book whose information he had sought. As nothing more could be done, I returned to my duties, and the preparation of supper.

I was interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Malone.

She dashed into the kitchen impetuously. Her face blazed with anger.

She burst into incoherent speech.

"Glory to goodness and what do ye think is happenin' now, Miss Sherry, dear! That me poor boy should be pestered and questioned until the wits is scared out of him! Dates and times and happenin's. Was ever the likes? What could the poor child do or say more than he gave when 'twas in the hospital bed he was? (The Lord between us and all harm!) Sure, I'm

fairly moithered with the man's questionin', and was it this way or that way it happened? Sure, they have all that settled and done for whin they held the inquest. Why in God's name should anyone come rakin' it all up agin? The man's dead, and a quare tiresome ould villain he was; but there, God rest his sowl—I wouldn't wish him harm and he in purgatory and all his sins to answer for!"

I put in a word as she paused breathlessly.

"What on earth's happened?"

"Happened is it? . . . Didn't ye know as that lawyer-man was in there wid us these hours past, and the whole bizness of the ould gintleman's death brought up again, and hundreds of questions put to me poor moithered boy. Yes, and writin' down the way he'd make his answers to thim!"

Light dawned on me. "Mr. Jassey, the lawyer? Was he doing all this?"

"I'm tellin' ye he was. He came in and began spachefyin' about our cottage and how long we'd lived in it, and who had the odd room I've sublet to ould Mrs. Bartley, that never does a stroke o' work, and is more trouble than her rint can pay me for! Papers he wanted to see, and sure I'd got no papers. I just took the place from Mr. Marsyas and paid him every quarter day, and now I'll be payin' his son. What use to stir up any trouble about it. And thin he would see Pat, and was askin' questions as I've tould ye just as if suspicionin' was wid him same as it's with the gossipin' ould fools around."

"Suspicions!" I laid down the bread-grater and slice of bread I had been crumbling for the patty tins. "What on earth *are* you talking of? What suspicions?"

Her face blanched suddenly. Her eyes had a queer furtive look as my own challenged them.

"I've heard nothing. What is there to hear?"

"Only a bit o' gossip. It started wid the boy who minds the stables at the big farm yonder. He said as he'd seen the ould man standin' there by the place they found him. . . . Moonlight it was, and he plain to see, and so nat'ral that the lad just said "good evenin'," without a thought that it was a *dead man* he'd be spakin' to. And then 'twas gone, and the lad giv a yell and ran for his life, and so the story got about. For if the ould man 'walks,' sure, it looks as if he was oneasy about his own death, and they'd say—"

I burst into impetuous speech. "What absurd nonsense! What on earth's the matter with you all! Can't you let the

dead rest in peace and his deeds with him? This sort of gossip is hateful! What good can it do?"

"Sure, no good at all. But the whole place is talkin'; and now the lawyer-gintleman comes along wid his questions, and Pat nigh off his head wid the fright of it. His oath on the Holy Book required. Sure, what more could he do than put the ould man on his way to the house and lave him to find it?"

"No more *was* required," I said. "Who is questioning it?"

"That lawyer-man as I tould ye of. He axed had Pat seen anyone else on the road. Was he sure there was a light in the house, and the likes o' that."

I took a chair and sat down. I was conscious of a sudden trembling in my legs. The room seemed to sway up and down before me.

"I can't understand it. I see no possible use in raising the question as to how that accident happened. It was settled at the inquest that it *had* happened, and but for that awful snowfall would not have had fatal results!"

"Ye'd have thought me poor boy was a murderer," she sobbed, bursting into sudden tears and subsiding into another chair. "It's terror-struck he is now, and that poor hand o' his examined, and how he'd come to hurt it, and the Lord knows all!"

She wiped her eyes with a corner of her shawl. I remained silent. The suggestion in her rambling speech was appalling. I recalled those words—and the way they had been spoken —"*if it was an accident.*"

But, of course, it was. It must have been . . . What else. . . .

III

Later—Same night.

A WRETCHED evening. Dad was so disturbed and irritated by Mr. Gideon Jassey's visit that he could eat no supper. I might have saved myself the trouble of making those little patties. We drank tea and nibbled toast, and talked over what had happened. I related Mrs. Malone's visit. It seemed to cap the rest of the puzzle.

"Gossip of the place!" echoed father. "Good heavens! Why don't they work on their farms and attend to their own business? There's no need to make a mystery out of simple facts. All the same, I wish that old man hadn't paid us that visit, but gone straight to his son's house. It would have saved a great deal of worry. Have you written that letter to Mr. Tarquin?"

I said I had thought it better to run over and see him. It was so hard to explain.

He agreed. In fact, there was nothing tangible to explain. Legal suppositions; legal technicalities; that was all Lincoln's Inn was good for! To entangle and complicate and obfuscate the non-legal mind! To make work for itself and its clerks, and pocket fees, and be a general worry to any enquirer.

"I've steered clear of lawyers all my life," he said. "It's hard that my late-won peace of mind is to be disturbed now!"

I said it might all blow over. I knew Tarquin as cool and determined. I thought he would be quite equal to holding his own. But even as I talked some foreboding crossed my mind.

I cleared away a scarce-tasted meal, set the lamp on the table and gave Dad his newspapers. Then I went to my own retreat and washed up and set things ready for the morning.

The wind had died down and the rain had ceased. I stood for a few moments at the back door gazing into darkness, emphasised here and there by a whitewashed post to mark the path.

I had felt so secure here; so certain that it was *our* own land I trod, our own house I tenanted. I had learnt to love that view of far-off hills; even the swart hummocks, and brown earth. The song of the wind seemed less harsh as it swept over personal acres. The unfruitful soil uttered kindlier promise when I trod it as a possession. My vision of a rock garden, of hardy creepers trained around the verandah posts, all hope of summer joys swept back as a regret now threatened by uncertainty. Supposing that hateful man could prove our ownership illegal? Supposing that some quibble of what he had called "executorship" gave him a right to interfere with all this scattered property, what would happen? Would Dad have to pay rent for what was really his own purchase? Could the place be re-sold, or re-let if we objected to such proceedings? Anyway, would it mean going to law with an uncertain copyright?

I closed the door and shut out the chill night air.

"To-morrow," I say to myself, "I will have all this settled. If it is Tarquin's property we are safe, and I fail to see how it can be anyone's else's!"

The evening has passed and bed-time arrived, and still I sit here with Boris on one side of me and this journal as recipient of my troubled confidences.

Two things haunt me with the fatal persistence of any unpleasant memory. That visit from Gideon Jassey, and the hint from Mrs. Malone that "gossip" was making free with the tragedy of the Manor Farm. Even that hateful man had said "*if it was an accident?*" Did he intend resurrecting the subject? Was not the verdict of "accidental death" safely registered? The proceedings closed? Whose business was it to put questions, or rouse doubtful issues?

I looked down at the head of Boris, gently laid upon my knee. I met the trust of his deep brown eyes.

"Your master is in trouble," I said softly. "But we will never believe ill of him, Boris . . . you and I. We'll trust him whatever happens."

And then I tell myself that all this will blow over. Nothing is going to happen. Nothing will be altered.

There! I've written enough for to-night, though I could write a great deal more.

Next evening—January 16th.

Not till I was cycling this morning to the Manor Farm did it occur to me that the lawyer might be staying there with Tarquin. The thought came as a check to speed. I had no wish to see him again. Also it would be awkward to ask for a private interview were he hanging around.

I wished with all my heart that Tarquin might be out of doors and I could speak to him without listeners. The day was dull and cloudy, but he might be in one of his fields, or at the planting of cabbages and kale in his big vegetable gardens.

Fortune favoured me, for at the turn of the road I met him; also cycling. We both dismounted.

"I was on my way to you," he said.

"Possibly the same errand?"

Looking at his face I saw it stern and colourless, as if the night had brought him little rest.

"The same errand," he repeated slowly . . . "Yes, perhaps it is. May I ask you to turn back? I want a word with your father."

"If it is to see his title-deeds of Silverhatch, I have them here. Dad is not very well this morning, and I should be glad if you would talk over this matter with me, in the first place. You see I met your father, and arranged everything with him about the purchase. Dad merely came over and signed the agreement, or whatever it was, and paid the money."

"I am extremely annoyed that the matter has been questioned," he said. "Of course it was no business of Jassey's. The land and bungalow are yours, even if the assignment was somewhat informal. We could set that right between ourselves and Somerset house, irrespective of Gideon Jassey."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, thank goodness!" I said. "If you only knew what a worrying night I've had!"

"I'm sorry; very sorry . . ."

There were dark shadows under his eyes. He had not smiled once. "That man," he went on, "is bent on making trouble. He was my father's agent as well as his lawyer. The informality of that will breaks up the connection as far as I'm concerned. I will have nothing to do with him. He knows that, and is trying to annoy me in every possible way. I've no doubt my father did many questionable things. The way he took you in over this farm is only one example. Five hundred would have been ample for it and for the worthless stock he imposed on you. With regard to the assignment—"

My hand went to my coat pocket, and I produced that historic foolscap.

"It's here, if you'd care to look over it?"

"I'm keeping you standing in the cold; shall we walk on? I would ask you into the farm, only that man is still there. But he leaves at two o'clock."

So we walked on, while he glanced at the paper and the inadequate stamp. The frown deepened on his brow.

"Yes, of course . . . I see what he means. But as I claim this property now I can legalise the matter. There need be no question of your right to the place. It was a *bona fide* purchase and, though this is not a regular deed of sale, it answers the purpose so long as purchaser and vendor are of the same mind. I should never dream of disputing it, and Jassey, being no longer the agent, has no right to do so."

"Then you—you *can* claim the inheritance?" I exclaimed eagerly.

"Why, of course. There is no one else. I am the only son, the only child in fact. I am going up to town next week to see my own lawyer and settle the affair once for all."

"Then why—"

I hesitated. I hardly liked to question Mr. Jassey's authority for interfering. But it left uncertainty behind it.

Supposing we wanted to leave the place, to re-sell Silverhatch, would this deed be accepted as proving our title to such a transference of rights? I stammered something to this effect.

Tarquin re-assured me. However, he would take the "deed" with him and have it fully stamped at Somerset House.

(The present modest 2s. 6d. stamp was only equivalent to a sale representing £25.)

I wondered whether my old "Melchizedek" had purposely illegalised this deed so that he could dispossess us at some future time? I did not hint my suspicion to his son, though I felt sure he had not a very high opinion of his father's character. With a heart lightened by comforting assurances I walked on beside him. Both of us wheeling our cycles; both rather silent.

But there is a silence at once restful and sympathetic. It is the severest test of friendship; the best proof of its reality.

That walk in the chill January morning seemed very short—yet rather wonderful when I look back on it. There was so little said, or done, and yet it looms large as an event in my colourless days. Its memory will go on with me to that future of possibilities, sweetening the relentless grind of work, the futile longings for companionship.

Looking back on it now with a comforting sense of security, I see that tall figure and stern colourless face in the light of a new friendliness. A sense that here is someone to be trusted. He had helped me from the first. He had understood my position to-day, seeing that I was the culprit in the first instance and the victim of my own impetuosity in the second. But all would be right. Dad need have no fear of eviction or illegality of purchase. It would not be questioned. Having administered this comfort I saw signs of restored appetite. He declared himself satisfied.

"I thought our friend Tarquin would set matters right. The property is now his and if I have been guilty of informalities I am willing to put things straight. All the same, my dear—"

and he threw a rueful glance at his legal volume—" this stamp duty is a serious expense. I find this deed may cost five or six pounds."

I said it was surely worth that to make it legal. Tarquin had promised to take it to Somerset House, so he would not have a railway journey to add to that expense!

He cheered up, and launched into praise of our new landlord, for he stood in that position until this purchase was assured. Neither of us said a word as to those dark hints which had signalised the advent of our unpleasant visitor.

I left him busied once again over his guide-book. There were quite a presentable number of pages to prove he did work at it!

For my part, I went about my domestic duties with a lightened heart, and later started to write an account of these unpleasant matters to Tony.

The letter lies there. I should not be surprised if it brought him over.

I may as well state here that the young man had long since informed his college authorities he had friends in the neighbourhood, and given Dad's name as a guarantee of his statement. " You'll be useful for 'leaves,'" he told me. " I think your Dad did something rather remarkable in Greek. Anyhow they remember him. I shine with reflected glory of his past 'greats' and mystical initials, B.A. and M.D. and F.A.S., and a host of the incomprehensibles!"

This was all news to me, for Dad had never been communicative on the subject of university achievements. I knew he was scholarly. That he had a record in Constitutional History, but he had not given much information as to university accomplishments. We had always been comfortably off until the War. But so much of my time had been passed at school owing to mother's chronic invalidism that I had accepted as quite usual the circumstances of our home life. There were servants to do things, and bills were paid, and I had a sufficiency of pocket-money. Youth didn't ask for more in days when home was a mere interlude between term and term.

The awful upheaval of " 1914 " altered all this. My experiences had matured and saddened me. I felt as if I and youth had parted when I bade farewell to school and donned the Land Girl's attire and worked from morn till sunset, so that greengrocers might be provided with cabbages and turnips and potatoes, and fields made productive for human needs.

It is strange to look back on it all now!

The mingled bravado and hopefulness of early days when a "year" was given as the longest duration. The gradual fears and griefs and disasters. The wonder as to why civilised human beings should do such brutal uncivilised things as filled scare lines in the newspapers and set the breakfast tables of England to perusal of ever-renewed horrors!

Strange indeed. But not more strange than the recurring problems of life. The perpetual questioning and wonderment inseparable from any sustained thought . . .

I check my pen as I write this last paragraph.

I broke off here. A persistent tapping at the back door had at last aroused my attention.

I went to open it. Pat Malone was standing there. He came in with stumbling feet; in the dim light his face looked scared and grey.

"What's the matter . . . is your mother ill?"

He passed into the kitchen and dropped on to the rug before the nearly extinct fire. I saw he was trembling greatly.

"Will th' ould man be gettin' me?" he said. "I've seen him again . . . watchin' there by the fence; up and down . . . like the swingin' of the clock . . . and just waitin' . . . "

He glanced round with wild affrighted eyes.

"What man? What on earth are you talking about?"

"Ye'd know well enough if ye'd been axed questions till the buzzin' in yer head was all ye'd be hearin'. What have I done that he shouldn't rest quiet . . . To come slippin' along scarifying me poor wits, and then sendin' that cruel man! Is it for killin' me they'd be? I tell ye, miss, I didn't do no harm . . . and if the place was dark . . . and thim stones handy, well, why was he swearin' at me and cuffin' me poor ears, for all the world as if I was a stray cur that hadn't a home or a master!"

I seized his shoulder and shook him violently. I asked what on earth he was talking about, and why wasn't he at home and in bed? I noted then that his shoes were muddy and his coat damp and stained.

"You've been out and you're frightened . . . is that it?"

He looked up again.

"I'm tellin' ye I see *him*, over there by the fence . . . and

he turnin' to follow me . . . so that me legs grew wake and I fell . . . and I came here whin I saw the light."

"Does your mother know you're out at this time of night?"

"She does not, for she'd fallen aslape wid the drop o' drink in her. Lyin' there she is on the flure. She does be that way often these times, wid the fear and the trouble on her mind."

"But who is it you saw by the fence?"

With some difficulty I gathered that it was the "ould man" as they'd found in the snow and buried in the churchyard beyond.

"They do say he's walkin', and folks have seen him . . . and now that lawyer man comes questionin' me agin; and me mother, she's always warnin' me not to spake, and not to say about the lanthern."

"The lantern? . . . What on earth has that to do with it?"

He stumbled to his feet, and stood swaying uncertainly. He muttered of bloodstains, and looked at his disfigured hand. I could gain nothing intelligible from him . . . only those mutterings about "stones" and bloodstains.

Evidently he too was one of the believers in that haunting apparition. I did my best to soothe him and persuade him to go home. I said there was no such thing as ghosts. That he only fancied he had seen a figure by the fence. It was possibly a shadow cast from the trees.

I really thought that the boy's mind was giving way under stress of blame, and that long tiresome visit of the lawyer. Also I felt sure that if Mrs. Malone had heard that story of the "walking" she had not kept it to herself. But it was too bad to frighten this half-witted creature, and set him to imagining what Irish folk are only too fond of imagining.

I offered to take him across the yard to his own door, and we started off together in the grey uncertain light.

I found the door unlatched and opened it for him. I would not go in from some innate dread of what I might behold in the way of inebriation. I had suspected Mrs. Malone before this, but I was reluctant to shame her to her face by discovery.

Possibly she and Pat understood each other in all conditions, and at that I left it, and them.

I returned to see Dad standing anxiously at our own back door, wondering what had become of me.

I explained the matter, with a half-jesting allusion to this superstition in the neighbourhood.

He listened as I moved to and fro, locking up doors, and extinguishing lights. Then, as I bade him good-night, he said something that surprised me.

"Do you know, Sherry, I never did like that boy, and I can't help thinking he's got something *on his mind*."

He would say no more. Give no reason. I felt as if relief on one matter had given place to suspicion on another. Mr. Gideon Jassey's visit had been singularly upsetting.

IV

Next Day.

TONY dashed over this morning to see us, and heard of our recent alarm.

As might be supposed, he refused to accept it as serious. Judged by his own "deed of partnership," our's was legal in intention if not in law! I had left the document with Tarquin so I could not show it, but I was only too ready to share his belief in the importance of a stamp. Once *that* was affixed our right to our poultry farm could not be questioned.

He walked with me among the well-trodden ways, and surveyed our lazy gormandising stock with severe disapprobation.

"Gayle, Garth and Co. have little reason to be proud of you," he harangued. "What is the matter? Why don't you do your duty? Here I have a poultry journal edited and contributed to by expert financiers—I mean *fanciers*. They inform me that you should all be engaged by now in the laudable effort of producing offspring. Here are coops awaiting you; warm shelters prepared for you; good nourishing food provided for you, and what do you do? Stand there in feathered indolence, regarding me with lack-lustre eyes; stuffing and scraping from morning till bedtime . . . By the way, Sher, have you given the brutes *salt*?"

I laughed. "Oh, Tony, you and your theories! I've come to the conclusion that the people who do best with poultry are

the people who take least trouble with them. Just turn them into an enclosure, or let them roam at will into any convenient field or garden. Throw them any sort of scraps, and trust to Providence for results!"

"Good!" said Tony. "As a matter of fact I imagine Providence does not concern itself with Nature. Just set it going, you know, and then said—'Do the best you can.' Hence all the agricultural problems. Rain when we want sunshine; drought when we seek rain; frost when the young buds and the young grain and the useful table veg: demand the succulent shower. Earthquakes when a city has spent centuries in evolving itself. Floods and fire and pestilence to destroy a harmless plantation . . ."

I interrupted the harangue to enquire if he was preparing for another debate? Why waste his eloquence on his present audience? He said: "everyone must do something to distinguish himself, and that he believed his strong point was 'oratory.'" I was too amused to contradict him. I asked the name of his Club. He said it was newly founded and, like the well-known hymnal for church service, contained an academic mixture of things Ancient and Modern. But it had its uses. It enforced a certain amount of attention to problems of the day. It expanded one's ideas; it abolished timidity of utterance. It helped one to—what the Americans so aptly termed —orate.

"Are you contemplating a parliamentary career after your college days are over?"

"We are considering it," he said pompously. "We possess a guardian in the House of Lords, and it has occurred to us that we might get even with him one of these days by proving the absolute worthlessness of that historic institution! Myself—I'm all for democracy and equal rights, as far as they *can* be equalised. Nature, of course, has conclusively proved they can't. 'Survival of the fittest' and all that Darwinian stuff. Take it as it is, or *cum grano salis*, 'tis all in the day's march to progress by ineffectual methods."

"Is that all written down for the next debate?" I asked him. And then he got off his stilts, and we both laughed till we could laugh no more, and he told me tales of scouts and "battels"—(a translation of college bills)—of Merton and "Maudlin," and interviews with Dons and Presidents. Of the queer mixture of "freshers," "undergrads," and undergrad-*uettes* who made for the activities of university life. Then,

with a sudden return to the exigencies of the present crisis, he read more extracts from his poultry journal. He pointed disgustedly to the picture of a grinning youth holding a bundle of £1 Treasury notes in one hand, and a single 10/- note in the other. It was inscribed as—"£19 10s. profit from sixteen fowls!"

"Sixteen, and we possess one hundred and fifty. What about it? Do you give them the proper spice? Ground insects with a sprinkle of cayenne and a hint of chutney?"

"All that and more, if it is contained in Karswood," I said.

"Well, well; our Mr. Garth is distinctly disappointed. Here he reads of fowls beginning to lay first of December and sit first of January. Here is a man who looks—from his photo—about the age of the aforesaid Mr. Garth—boasting—yes, and publishing his boast, that in a small back yard with sixteen fowls (eleven of them Leghorns, by the way) he has made a profit of nearly twenty pounds!"

"In a year," I said, glancing at the figures. "We haven't had six months' trial yet, and the new birds have only been here three months. You wait till the end of this year and then have yourself photographed with Bradburys and smiles, and statistics of expenses of outlay!"

He said he should certainly do so if the end justified the process. Then he added that a ton or two of Karswood meal and spice would be coming along shortly as his contribution to the enterprise.

Making due allowance for his peculiar forms of exaggeration, I thanked him very warmly. The constant outlay, and the weekly housekeeping, were rather a burden on my slender finances.

I knew Dad was hopeless in the matter. He had put most of his capital into this venture, and it remained with me to make it profitable, or—

But *that* didn't bear thinking of!

Tony shared our simple luncheon, and I told him then about this talk in the village and also of Pat Malone's story the previous night. Of course, he scoffed at the idea of a ghost.

"All the same, my dear people, it's an unpleasant story to get around. You never know where that sort of thing will end. Not so long ago they started similar talk in a north country

village, and the result was an order from the Home Office for exhumation."

I started. "Do you mean to say that after—after everything is over—"

Dad looked up from his plate. "I suspected that man Jassey was up to no good. Peering and prying and questioning. You see he couldn't even leave that wretched half-witted lad alone . . . Of course, he might have led the old man to a wrong place . . . there might even have been a dispute. They mutually disliked one another. But, as a question of assault—" he shook his head.

"Was there such a question?" asked Tony.

"Not at the inquest. They seemed only too ready to accept circumstantial evidence. I was thinking of what Shirley said. What the boy let fall. . . There's something queer about it. And his belief that the old man was watching and following him last night."

"Any tragedy means some sort of gossip," observed Tony. "That's the worst of these small places. They've so little to interest them that they make up for it by invention."

"You must allow they have some grounds for this present gossip. It was an awful thing to have happened almost at the very door of his son's house."

An uncomfortable silence fell upon us all. I think each of us was trying to recall the details of that tragedy. The visit; the tea; the walk. The terrible snow-storm; those intervening days, and then the discovery.

I had hoped it was over and done with. I disliked this hint of another meaning to what had been framed and certified as "accident." Of course, it was that. What else could it have been? And then I heard Dad say in an odd, reluctant tone—"I have always wondered those wounds in the head were never questioned?"

Wounds in the head!

Tony looked up, surprised as myself.

"But surely . . . I mean in the accounts of the inquest they were said to be natural results of his fall . . . sharp stones . . . and he was no light weight."

"Agreed," said Dad. "On the other hand, if that ill-natured urchin had chosen to use one . . . even as a weapon of defence? . . . You know what he said last night. You told me, Shirley . . . '*The place was dark and the stones handy.*' And he had been scolding the boy for his mistake of

the entrance. ' *Swearing and cuffing me poor ears* ' . . . his words again."

I looked at Tony. " If there was what you called an exhumation and it was discovered that he had been— "

" Murdered," said Tony, coolly. " Well, then there'd have to be a trial, and the whole case fought out on a new basis."

" Suspicion and gossip have led to many unexpected convictions," said Dad.

" But why should there be suspicion ? Who is responsible for this gossip ? "

" Ah—now you're asking ! " said Tony. " 'Who,' and ' They say.' Near of kin, and responsible for more mischief than a Chinese dope-seller. Is it to someone's interest to keep this affair buzzing ? Then the question is—whose ? "

Involuntarily I glanced at father's attentive face. He was regarding Tony with unusual gravity. He laid down his knife and fork.

" I might have said ' no one's,' but for that visit of Mr. Gideon Jassey's," he said. " It puzzled me at the time. I failed to see what business he had to come here enquiring about the terms on which I bought this place. But light has dawned. He stands to lose a good deal of money if the younger Marsyas refuses to employ him as agent, or man of business. In all matters concerned with property a lawyer contrives to get some pretty pickings. Well, if the settlement of old Marsyas's affairs can be delayed, there must be a certain profit to be made out of them. This Mr. Jassey takes up the rôle of executor despite that unsigned will. Supposing—I only put it conditionally—but supposing he threatened our Tarquin with re-opening the enquiry, if he opposed this executorship ? He has proof there was a quarrel between father and son. He has told me that the signing of that will was conditional on the son's agreeing to the sale of the Manor Farm. He might stay on as a tenant, but the place would not be his. Now I happen to know, and Shirley knows, that the possession of that farm is the dearest thing in life to its present owner. Am I right ? "

I nodded. I felt I could not speak. So queer and unexpected it all was.

" I've given the subject a good deal of thought. The death of the old man was a particularly fortunate happening for one person concerned. If an accident—well, that settles it. If—on the other hand—a question of motive is sought there are two. Pat Malone hated the old man who had always treated him badly.

Tarquin was never very friendly, and the threat of dispossession of the one place he loved might have—mind you, I only say *might* have—turned him desperate. Such things have been known. Now, in the enquiry at that inquest there was one question never asked. What *time* did the Irish lad leave the old man? If it was before the snow came on, and if his fall was just an accidental slip of the foot, the probabilities are that he would have recovered and been able to get to the house. At least call for help. On the other hand—"

But I could stand no more. "Oh Dad, *don't!*" I cried. "It's like being in the police court!"

And then, for the first time since the tragedy, there swept to my mind the remembrance of that letter found among Dad's papers. I recalled the anger, the threat in the torn fragment. I recalled, too, that neither my father nor myself had mentioned it when the lawyer had questioned us of the old man's visit. Why? I could not say.

Perhaps the same thought was in both minds. It was an unpleasant letter, with something threatening in its tone. It had nothing to do with us.

I was recalled by Tony's voice.

"What's the matter, Sherry? You've gone as white as the table cloth."

I stammered some excuse. I was tired. I had slept badly, and that boy's visit had upset me.

Tony suggested a change of subject and a spin in the little car to buck me up. So we hurried over the meal and I left "washing up" till I returned, and having arranged Dad's tea-tray and left him with nothing to do but boil the kettle, I dressed and went off.

As we skirted the Manor Farm I saw one of the men coming out of the gate. He was signalling to us. Tony pulled up.

He came to the car and handed me a letter.

"The master said as I was to take this round to-night, Miss; but seein' you was goin' by I thought 'twas no matter to give it you now. And 'twill save me a journey. Walked off our legs we is these times. He don't spare us for certain."

I took the letter.

"He've gone to London this mornin's train," added the man. "For a matter o' three or four days. But he hasn't forgotten to leave us plenty o' work; not he. A hard one to please for all he do pay us well!"

" Gone to London ? "

He had not taken long to decide, and I felt grateful for a note that would at least formalise uncertainty.

Tony asked if I wanted to read the letter now, and he would slacken speed. I hesitated, but curiosity got the better of me. I could not but wonder why Tarquin had written, considering the matter was fully discussed two days ago.

I tore open the envelope. Tony averted his head with ostentatious appearance of indifference.

Dear Miss Gayle—

I have made up my mind to run up to town at once and settle my affairs, which include that agreement of purchase of your farm and house.

Rest assured it will be quite satisfactory. Not for worlds would I have you annoyed or disturbed by any sense of insecurity in the transaction.

I will send you back the deed from town if I am detained. But I hope to return in two days. Three at the most.

My regards to your father.

Sincerely yours,
Tarquin Marsyas.

" Billy-dux finished ? " enquired Tony. " We are not in the least curious, but when the mantle of prophecy has fallen upon us it is not unpleasing to sample verification. A straw shows, well—not to put too fine a point on it—the ways of the wayward zephyr. That sounds like poetry. Shall we have a try for the Newdigate before we shake academical dust from off our shoes ! "

" He has gone to London to settle up his affairs," I said, putting the letter into my coat pocket. " And, incidentally, to get our deed of possession secured."

" A very necessary precaution. We shall have the Socialists snatching our roofs from over our heads before another couple of years. Garth, Gayle and Co.—I beg pardon, names should be reversed—(taken as read, partner)—may now rest on oars of tranquillity, otherwise principles of incubation, engendered by unsatisfactory hens who are proving daily that Nature is not to be relied on."

" I hate those things," I said. " I won't try one unless the birds get too hopeless. But the time is just coming on. You're in such a hurry. We shall have eggs and sitters and chicks in plenty by the time Spring is here."

He looked thoughtful. "Ah, Spring! . . . What a blessing to look forward to. Only I'm told that she delays her visits to this part of the world until June, or thereabouts."

"Tony!"

"Fact, my dear. So don't get any cottons and zephyrs and gossamer 'neathies,' as Kit call 'em. Oxford as a place—and a county—possesses a vile climate. You're frozen or drenched for nine months of the year, and frizzled to a cinder for three. Of course, my experience has been brief, but unpleasant. I merely repeat what I have heard of more cheerful prospects."

With a recollection of my own sufferings with regard to weather I could not but agree that the climate had much to answer for. Still, I refused to believe that Spring would neglect us. The year was only in its first weeks. There was plenty of time for sun and sky to make amends for absence, for gloom.

So talking and arguing we flashed into the beautiful Woodstock Road, and then more guardedly advanced into the heart of the town.

"There'll be time to do a couple of colleges, if you like," said Tony.

I said I would like. I had to see them all before I was satisfied. So he took me over Magdalen that most beautiful and dignified of buildings, where the gardens ramble to the riverside and the tame deer browse in the shade of the elm trees.

I am sure that those deer, and the shady "water walk," beloved of Addison, must surprise visitors even more than the huge quadrangles, or the chapel, or the banqueting hall. The sight of green lawns and deer park made me long afresh for Spring's alchemy. How beautiful it must all be with the trees in full leafage and the gardens bright with flowers!

"The authorities are generous enough to leave these grounds *free* to the public," remarked Tony. "I hope it (collective noun) appreciates the privilege. Empty beer bottles and banana skins and torn paper would scarcely improve our academic haunts any more than Tom or Jack or 'Tilda's names carved on seats so thoughtfully provided. I'm happy to say, though, that there's less hooliganism in Oxford than other places. There's a sort of dignity—am I wrong?"

"Quite right," I agreed. "The place must impress even a casual sightseer. It is History, and it is Wisdom, and it is England at her best."

"Let us now adjourn to the cloisters," said Tony.

I steeped myself in beauty and antiquity. I saw the Chapel and Hall and the matchless Bell Tower, and the quaint allegorical statuary, and the great library with its priceless treasures and examples of early printing. More and more was I convinced that such surroundings and the privileges attached to them *must* have an excellent effect on the mind of youth. Must create an atmosphere of thought and the importance of life even for the careless and sport-loving 'graduate. All the stories I had heard of wildness, extravagance, riotous living, recurred to me as exaggerations. So many great names, great lives, great results were here in shape of commemoration or portrait. All the Arts seemed so widely represented that their neglect could boast of no excuse. Once again I urged upon Tony the sin of wasting such opportunities, or adopting the modern attitude of indifference towards college and college discipline, and all the advantages they offered.

V

More of Oxford.

A HURRIED peep at the venerable-looking University College and then a dive under a gloomy archway, brought us up to the beautiful Shelley memorial.

The irony of changing times and opinions was surely never perpetuated with more open rebuke.

From this college the poet had been expelled with rebuke and opprobrium for opinions which were now widely accepted and openly discussed! I stood and looked at the careless grace of the marble figure; white and still as when the waves had cast his lifeless corpse ashore at Spezia. Indifferent now to what was said or suffered. Dismissed in shame, yet now memorialised in honour. Who shall account for the follies of mankind, or those vagaries which make the sinner of one period the saint or hero of another?

Tony did not share my enthusiasm for the poet, or his works. He was of opinion that Kipling was the only sort of chap who made poetry worth while!

Of course that closed the argument.

Up the "High" we wandered; past St. Mary's, which I had

not yet visited, much as I longed to attend a service. All that sort of thing had to wait on weather and longer days. It was impossible to get to Oxford and back on Sundays, unless one came by motor car. (I did not like to ask Tony to call for and drive me, and so had kept silent on the subject.)

We strolled through the Turl and into Broad Street, and then had tea at the old North Gate House at the corner of Ship Street, clambering up a narrow, crooked staircase to a quaint room all oak and blue china, with tiny latticed windows looking out on Cornmarket.

It was of the historic age of 500 years, and Tony affected fear that our joint weight might be too great a burden for the floor. The sight of tea-tables and waitresses seemed to arouse all his old absurdity. But I felt in no mood for it to-day. The chaff and slang and laughter grated on my nerves.

I came to the conclusion that it is a difficult matter to find the mood and the hour and the companion all suited to each other, though I did not quote Browning to Tony after hearing of his poetical preference.

I hurried over tea so as to get home before dark. I had to feed the fowls, and return to neglected duties concerned with unwashed plates and dishes.

The contrasts of life are at once its irony and its consolation. They keep us from too strenuous thought on one subject at all events!

I got out at the cross-roads and sent Tony back. I watched him light up, and then walked quickly on to the bungalow.

I found Dad just finishing a late tea, and a second egg. I sat down and related all I had done and seen.

"Oxford is an unending interest," I said. "I wonder you didn't stay there. You might have ended as Master of Balliol. Rising from Fellowships and Dons to some great professorship."

He tried to explain intellectual distinction as apart from a commercial asset. True, a First Class in honours might mean a future halo for some Cabinet Minister, or ambitious Bishop. True, also, that in his days the genuine student received a certain amount of attention, but after four years' experimenting with philosophy or theology or Latin prose one needed relaxation. He had never specialised, being more interested in general knowledge as a factor for future citizenship. "I had pictured

a parliamentary career, but alas! the electors of my particular constituency held a different opinion. I dabbled in literature. Translations of the classics for school use; some serious fiction. I married your dear and amiable mother. We were comfortably off, and I gave my only daughter an excellent education. There—so far as it may interest her—is a *résumé* of my uneventful life. I ask for my remaining years only my books; some satisfying nourishment; and—peace."

I said to myself—"Is that all a university career does for a man—even a writer? Set him to travesty Sophocles and Virgil and Bowdlerise classic literature for use of schools?"

As long as I could remember, Dad had always passed his days in his study or pottering about the garden of our Willesden house, and mother had been always rushing off to foreign "*Curs*" and Spas for various complaints that flourished only in British air. Of my own life I have spoken, and as this journal promises to shape into something of a literary effort, I need not repeat it. Perhaps some day I'll turn the experience of my uneventful years into fictional shape!

There may be money to be made by pen as well as poultry.

February 14th.

A long gap in my records does not mean that they have been unrecorded.

I offer this explanation to myself in a leisured hour when I sit down in a mood of content with life and its promises. I have notes enough of the days that are past to fill pages, but I merely select what seem rather to fill in my story. For I am vain enough to think there *is* a story shaping itself out of what promised to be a dull and monotonous experience—(Heaven forfend there be not a tragedy, too!)

To begin, or more correctly, continue my records, the assurance of our ownership of Silverhatch was certified by a fully stamped deed, and Tarquin had a long talk with Dad over various improvements and the possibility of a small agrarian addition to our few acres.

I never knew anyone so keen on tillage and pasturage and getting all that was possible out of land as he was.

He had quietly assumed possession of the Manor Farm and told us he intended adding another forty acres to his present boundary as soon as he could afford it. I came to the conclusion, therefore, that he had legalised his claims and we need trouble ourselves no more respecting Mr. Gideon Jassey.

To descend to my own small interests is to confess a certain degree of satisfaction with my poultry. They had taken to vigorous laying. After that various ladies of the community gave signs of "broodiness." I hailed the symptoms with delight and now have some dozen hens cooped and sitting on as many sets of eggs.

I had carefully recorded dates, and by the end of this month I anticipate a young feathered flock to add to my original collection. So far good. I have communicated these facts to my erratic partner. He is at present engrossed in attending college lectures and preparing for some odd function called "the Torpids." I learn this is a matter concerned with boats and river-practice. His disjointed explanations leave much to the imagination. He had advised my doing no more sight-seeing of colleges until next vacation. By then the trees would be out and the gardens really well worth seeing, not "dry sticks and suggestion," as he put it.

Another item of news which has thrilled me is the near advent of a visit from Kit. All Tony's people are coming to Oxford for Eights' Week. But that festival does not come off till June. Kit, however, writes that she is anxious to see me under "farm-yard auspices," and if I can put her up she will be here in March. Fervently I pray for an early Spring with reference to the calendar and memories of rare examples of sunshine. As to "putting her up" it simply means giving her my room and betaking myself to what we call the cubicle.

I have been busy with cretonnes and cushions, and simple effects suitable for my tiny domicile. If I can secure a supply of flowers—but I may safely trust that to Tony. He had already what he termed "peppered the home horticulturies" with bulbs, and masses of wallflower.

Meanwhile, I have to feed my "sitters" twice a day, as they must not leave their eggs. (Mrs. Waddles is again showing symptoms, but I do not encourage her after my previous experience.) My time is, therefore, fully occupied, and I have little leisure for village gossip, or even the entertainments which have suddenly revived. I hear of whist drives and "jazz dances," and even a concert. That, however, came to grief at an early stage owing to lack of local talent.

Dad is still writing up his Guide-Book, and has developed a sudden activity. He takes long walks, and gets hold of queer legends and scraps of gossip respecting the rural hamlets scattered around. He says it is like going back to ancient his-

tory to visit them. There are people who have never been in a train. There are scores who have never seen Oxford and consider London at the end of the world! Roads which traversed the distances from Wessex to Mercia in the 10th century had been changed in name and route, but their history was obscured in myths, and even the Thames sought for signification through the Ouse as a dialectic form of origin.

Of course, all this delights Dad in his efforts at guide-grubbing. If his book is ever published it should be unique!

And now among so many generalities is there nothing of personal interest? I send my mind backward on the track of little incidents. A meeting, a talk, a cycle-ride round the new ten-acre field which Tarquin has added to the Manor Farm.

It is being ploughed and sown, and he talks of a wheat crop in August. I have never ventured to ask any more questions respecting that odious lawyer, neither has Tarquin volunteered any information. Only he seems to have a rooted dislike to the two Malones, mother and son, and hinted he would like to push them off to their own country. I was rather surprised.

"They seem harmless folk," I answered.

He retorted that the Irish were an idle, thriftless race, for ever disputing and for ever discontented. He said the Malones' bit of ground and poultry yard were the worst kept in the whole district. If they would only clear out he would raze the cottage and add the ground to ours. We should then have a proper fowl run, and be able to introduce new methods.

"An incubator would give you five-hundred chickens," he said, "where now you may only have a few dozen."

I told him I disliked the idea of artificial hatching. He urged that if this was to be a business and a lucrative one at that, it was absolutely necessary to march with the times.

"There is money in eggs," he went on; "and money in table poultry, and money in exhibition stock. One man in this very neighbourhood tells me he is making five-hundred a year. I suppose you would not object to do the same?"

"Object? . . . I should think I was making a fortune!"

"Then will you allow me to advise you? Small beginnings often lead to great ends. With patience, and some attention to the science of the matter, a poultry farm can be made a good paying business. The first two years you'll find trying; after that you'll forget the troubles in which they originated."

I liked to hear him talk. If he was interested in a subject he made it interesting to his listener. He who had ploughed up gorse and nettles and won crops of grain from grudging soil, was no tyro in Nature's possibilities.

The sight of his own new acres seemed only an incentive to further industries.

A Land of Promise stood revealed to him, where the mere onlooker saw only barren meadows, sheltered by gaunt trees, gorse-bitten and over-run by rabbit warrens and field mice.

I could not help admiring his strength of will. The determination he had shown and still held in leash as a future effort. It would be years yet before the dream of his life stood in cultured glory of Reality! But he would work and wait for that result as only the strong can wait—and work. A weak will tires before opposition. I felt that "Tarquinius Superbus" would never tire until he had won out, and achieved his heart's ambition.

There was one thing, however, which forced itself upon even my unwilling attention. It was the fact of his unpopularity. He seemed absolutely friendless. I never heard anyone in the village, or among our scattered neighbours, say anything kindly about him. He was alluded to as a "hard man." As one who wanted his three-farthing change out of every penny. Who never did anything helpful unless it bore promise of results favourable to himself, or some scheme he had in view.

And once or twice (how I *hate* to write this!) I had heard sinister whispers. Hints that if certain matters had not been hushed up so speedily one might have got at the truth of a mysterious "accident." It had turned out too fortunate a one not to rouse discussion. It had brought in its train profit and prosperity, and fostered that pride of possession which is neither more nor less than a crime to the non-possessors.

But the climax of unpopularity was reached when it was rumoured that Mrs. Malone and her weak-witted boy were to be turned out of their cottage. The said cottage was a ramshackle shanty sorely in need of repair and a constant eyesore to Dad and myself. All the same, the Irishwoman had held it for some five years, at a very small yearly rental. She had started keeping poultry, like most of the community, and had grown a few potatoes and useful vegetables in her plot of land. Now, she was advised that owing to its bad state of repair, her cottage was to be pulled down. If another was built—of which her landlord was doubtful—it would be a good-sized bungalow

with some additional land. Mrs. Malone was advised to return to Ireland now the war was over. Her son was always moaning and muttering of his longing for the "ould home." Why not take him back, and with him her stock of breeders, of whom she was always boasting?

When I first heard this I questioned her as to its truth.

She was in a strange, sullen mood. She hinted "there was enemies of her poor moithered boy as only wanted him out of their way. If not, why should they be offering a paid passage and enough capital to restart the poultry industry in her own country?"

"But who offers this?" I asked.

"Who?" Her eyes flashed with renewed indignation. "*Who* is it? You to be axin' that, Miss Shirley—and as thick as thieves the two av ye! Don't we know that it's because yerself spoke against the poor little place, and it not bein' kep so grand or so nate as yer own, that he said we must be lavin' it?"

"How dare you say such a thing! It's quite untrue. I never said anything against the place!"

"Ye've said it to Pat and to meself, and why not to others as is only too ready to listen?"

Argument was useless. I knew, of course, that she was alluding to Tarquin and our friendliness, and it annoyed me very much that out of that fact she had woven so drastic a grievance.

But the person who can persuade an Irishman, or Irishwoman that they alone are to blame for any unfortunate happening, has yet to be found! A hundred reasons why it should *not* have happened are set against the plain fact of an imprudence or a fault which courted the disaster. If the disaster had overtaken any third person, well and good! But the personal touch is bitterly resented, even if the "will o' God" comes later into its discussion.

I could plainly see that for some occult reason Tarquin and Dad and myself were arraigned as the bringers of this trouble. Mrs. Malone had abused her domicile and its drawbacks frankly enough until asked to vacate it. Then it became her dearest possession!

"The swate little house and me bit o' land that I'd be hoeing and plantin' all the bad years, and now promisin' me the reward! Sure, 'tis the hard thing that's asked of me to give them up in me ould age!"

I wanted Dad to talk to her, but he refused ; and Ganders only said that " to be delivered from the clack of her tongue he'd run a mile any day of the year."

Thus matters stood when this pleasant February morning signalised the birthday of St. Valentine.

I have gathered wild violets in the garden and heard the chirp and flutter of birds in the still leafless trees. I've even assured myself that the hedges show a hint of greenness.

The poultry yard is astir with stately Leghorns and white fussy Wyandottes. The young cockerels are fighting some order of precedence. The old ones strut to and fro valorously as umpires. There is a hint of Spring at last. An end of dark days and steely skies, even if the wind is still tempered with sharp remembrance of its past capabilities.

Oh ! I have longed for Spring and Summer as never before. I face new activities, heavier responsibilities ; but I face them with courage. Life has settled into a satisfactory groove, and I am prepared to accept what the Future holds with less fear ; a new sense of content.

To be always busy, constantly occupied, afford a sense of satisfaction apart from physical fatigue.

" I'm only *pleasantly* tired, " I tell Dad, when he asks me if I'm not doing a bit too much.

(I feel well and strong and capable of doing a great deal more !)

And so I greet the Spring and prepare for Kit's advent, and wonder what on earth a young lady of fashion will find to do and amuse herself with in these out-of-world surroundings !

I wonder, too, as I pause to look back on past memories, what on earth the said lady of fashion will think of her school friend now !

VI

Another Interlude.

A WHIRL ! That is the only way of expressing what my life has been for the past few weeks.

Now that I look back, now that I am once more alone, I find it no easy task to piece incidents and events into one continued

record. For long I have written nothing, because I had not a moment's leisure. Because a restless, beautiful, tormenting person came rioting into our peaceful days, and set the hours spinning like a humming top to her various inventions.

Kit—in other words Lady Katherine St. Aubyn—presented to me the new aspect of the modern girl; fresh from Riviera triumphs, from Swiss exploits of mountaineering and tobogganing, from conquests innumerable, and escapades from which the shadow if not the meaning of propriety was banished.

She was a hundred times more beautiful, more perfected as a work of twentieth-century artifice, than the Kit I had known and worshipped in school-girl fashion, and parted from with tears of real sorrow.

She had sent a telegram to say she was coming a day before I had expected her. Tony would meet her at Oxford and motor her up to Clanditch. The wire caught me busy with a first brood of chicks, and they gave me a busy day, apart from domestic preparations. Fortunately her room was ready, and the question of an evening meal could be solved by our driving into the town for dinner. Tony might be trusted to arrange that.

I commandeered Ganders for the day, as Mrs. Malone still presented an unfriendly countenance. About four o'clock I was just going to change from my working clothes into something more presentable when a beautiful shining Morris car dashed up, and the greeting of a horn gave warning of visitors.

Just as I was, in overall and leggings, I rushed to the door and stood open-armed, forgetful of all but the joy of welcoming my friend.

For the first moment it was just—"Oh, Kit, Kit darling!" and "Dear old Sherry, it's good to see you again!" Then we drew apart and criticised changes of time and conditions.

She wore a fur coat and a small close hat round which a cinnamon-coloured veil was twisted to fall in flowing ends on one side. She had that cool finished look one sees nowadays in the self-possessed girl for whom life holds few secrets. I felt her eyes criticising me in a sort of polite wonderment. I knew I must explain my appearance, and yet all the time I resented explanation. Kit, the Kit of old days, would not have needed any.

I stammered apology. I had just been going to dress. I hadn't expected her so soon. Then Tony joined us and I led the way into the sitting-room and Dad gave her a warm welcome

They were old friends. I saw the surprise with which she took in the humble simplicity of changed conditions; but she did not remark on them.

Tony was boisterous, and he and she entertained Dad with scraps of travel information and delight at renewal of friendship, and a little, just a little wonderment at the Bungalow. "Isn't it a trifle on the small side?" she said.

"We're only two. We find it quite large enough," said Dad.

Then I asked if she would like to see her room, and she sent Tony for her suit cases. There were two. One a glorified dressing bag, with everything for ordinary needs, and the other stuffed with clothes that I could have told her were useless here, among ploughed fields and deserted roads.

She said her tiny bedroom was "sweet," but I had an uncomfortable sensation of condescension in the pronouncement. I did not feel called upon to apologise, for my letters had told her often enough of our straitened means, and the entire change in our mode of life. It was surely the duty of friendship to accept such changes as a necessity; not criticise them as a disadvantage.

A sense of restraint overtook me. I could not talk with the old freedom and abandon; the security of being understood, the sense of mutual interests. Her own flow of words swept to me on a current of accustomed fluency and a great many odd phrases. New slang. New expressions. Amidst them all a startled Shirley Gayle questioned herself, "Is this Kit—*my* Kit? . . . the friend I loved and thought so perfect?"

The sting of that cool wonderment—"Surely to goodness, Shirley, you needn't make quite such a guy of yourself? Wait till you see *my* Land Girl's costume!"

That was what she had said, and I, colouring hotly, conscious of her tip-to-toe perfection, could only retreat in muddy confusion, and make the hurried toilet that formed my afternoon-tea attire.

"Of course, it must seem strange. She doesn't understand . . . How could she?" I muttered this to myself as I threw aside dusty shoes, thick stockings, and stained overall.

I felt instinctively I should not meet approval even by change of garb. Kit had always possessed that sense of clothes which, aided by an unlimited purse, can do so much for a woman. I dressed less for appearance than comfort. Frivolities of fashion

seemed absurd in a place where work was the order of the day. "Tailor-mades" represented the best dressed women I had seen in the university town, and tailor-made I had remained. So when I rejoined my friend she saw merely a tweed coat and skirt, not too well cut, over a plain white silk blouse.

I hurried to the kitchen to get tea, being speedily joined by Tony.

"Isn't she slap-up? The finished article? Just a wonder!"

"Town mouse, and country mouse," said I, setting out tea-cups on the brown wooden tray. Then I explained my difficulty about dinner.

"Oh, that'll be all right. She's engaged that limousine for while she's here. It will come every day, and you can spin into Oxford in no time."

"But the chickens are coming out. I expect a fresh batch almost every day. One already, and it keeps me busy. Feeding and all that. They're so weak at first, and some of the hens so stupid."

"What? A family at last? Real *bona-fide* infants? I must see them!"

He dashed off through the scullery and out of the back door. I heard Kit come out of her room and called to her.

She watched my preparations a moment and then joined Tony. I felt he might be trusted to do the honours of the poultry farm, and that our guest would see for herself what it meant. When I called them in to tea she was laughing and jesting over the partnership, and showed herself more like the Kit of old days. That first tea was quite a merry meal. Dad talked rattling good common sense and presented a situation she could not but compassionate as contrast to "better days." The outcome of a crisis which might even have befallen herself, or her own people. Gradually restraint vanished. Gradually we turned back to old times, and memories. I felt that while she was here she would put off the affectations of her special "set," and adapt herself to our way of living.

The little room had a sense of holiday. It echoed with laughter and talk and the play of light jests. It was vital with youth and spring air and the scent of spring flowers. It set off the golden-brown of Kit's smart frock and hat, the sheen of her burnished hair and the lovely tints of her vivid face.

She was beautiful in all senses of the word. I feasted my eyes on her in ever-increasing wonder.

How kind Nature is to some people!

I fulfilled all my duties before I agreed to departure for dinner. They insisted Dad should come also, but this he refused. "I am an old man. I've done with junketing and merry-making. I'll be much happier here with my work. Shirley can leave me a tray-supper ready in the kitchen. That's all I need."

Kit concealed a natural surprise, but said no more. I felt thankful there was to be no question of evening dress. We were all to go to a restaurant where, in Tony's expression, they gave you a "tip-top feed." It was much patronised by the leading lights of the colleges. Kit had never been to Oxford before. She was keen on seeing and doing everything that the visitor does see and do. Like myself, she had once held ideas of the "undergraduette" life. The finishing touch of "Lady Margaret" or Somerville. However, all that was tradition now. We had seen a very wide chasm open between the dreams of studentship and war's aftermath of a disturbing peace.

As I was leaving the room with the tea-tray, Tony suddenly burst out—"I say, Sherry, suppose we ask Torks! I've ordered dinner for four, and since the pater backs out—"

I started and almost let the tray fall. "You do blurt out things so unexpectedly, Tony! If you want him, better drive round now and ask while I'm washing up . . . You go too, Kit," I added. "I'd like you to see the Manor Farm."

"And the Manor Farm's master," said Tony. "Our show piece, if I may say so. Tarquinius Superbus o' that ilk. Lord of the Manor and many broad acres."

I left him to descriptions and set down my tray. Presently Kit called out that she was going with Tony. A vision of golden-browns and a knot of mauve orchids nodded farewell to me.

"I'm off to capture your modern Cincinnatus. Wish me luck!"

Wish me luck!

The words set themselves to the rhythm of china and teaspoons in the enamel basin. To the outward stir of home-going birds, the faint rustle of the sighing wind.

What did she mean? Why should I wish her luck, who already possessed so much of it? To whom life's pathway had

been but smooth and pleasant ground? Luck, in the exploit of capturing Tarquin Marsyas as a fresh captive for her chariot wheels of triumph! Luck, in that she might dazzle or fascinate a man to whom such visions of womanhood were rare enough to excuse the fascination!

I found myself wondering if he would come? I looked at my hands, red and puffed from hot water and soda. I rubbed them with glycerine and lemon juice, thinking all the while of those lovely slender white fingers and flashing rings that had emphasised Kit's gestures.

What would he think of her?

I had determined to make no change in my dress. The blue velvet and a small toque would have been more in keeping with Kit's toilette, but to change *now* would seem as if I had done it for a special reason. I arranged Dad's supper-tray, and left him some coffee to heat up, and then put on my hat—and waited.

The fact of being so long over their errand made me think Tarquin had been captured. I knew he would insist on a change of clothes. Had they caught him coatless, collarless, as I had so often seen him?

Boris suddenly stalked in. I watched him lift his head and turn his beautiful soft eyes towards the front door.

"You know?" I said—stroking the graceful head, and glad of some company in a troubled moment.

Whether he knew or not, the car suddenly shot up. He accompanied me to the door, and I watched the greeting.

Tarquin was seated with Kit, and Tony was driving. Boris laid his front paws on the side of the car and barked a joyous welcome. I heard the deep-toned—"Well, old man, how are you?" And then the speaker looked out and over to where I stood. He raised his hat. Tony started an enquiry as to whether I was ready. I simply nodded, and closed the door and went out.

"Your friends have kindly asked me to join your party," said Tarquin. "I haven't been in Oxford for long—and I really think I was getting tired of my own company."

He rose. "Will you sit here, or—"

Tony looked round. "You come along with me, Sherry, and watch me drive. This *is* a corker! Kit says she can drive it herself, but I'd not trust her."

I glanced at Kit. Nestled back amongst cushions; a gay striped rug thrown across her knees.

"Wouldn't you rather sit in front?" I asked.

"Oh, no, my dear; I'm quite comfortable. I had enough of Tony coming here. It's your turn now."

I got in, and ordered Boris back to his own regions. Dad stood at the window waving farewells. We seemed to glide into space.

"Beautiful!" I murmured, as Tony looked enquiry.

"Tell me, had you any difficulty in persuading—."

"Who—oh, Torks, you mean? No. Came, saw, conquered. That was Kit's share. He fell like a stone and rose like a cork and there he is!"

Taking the description for what it was worth, I said no more.

I suppose I ought to be writing of an unusually good dinner. Of excellent light wine with which our guests' health was toasted. Of Tony's absurdities; of Tarquin's grave attention. Of amusement derived from other diners—the heirs of past undergraduate ages, assembled and convivial. Drinking champagne at prohibition war prices; ordering *à la carte* from *hors d'œuvres* to devilled bones. Chaffing waitresses and assuring a somewhat anxious head waiter of their integrity in the matter of payment. It was all very amusing, and very young.

Kit's lovely face brought unchallenged attention to our table.

Dinner over, we adjourned to a newly-opened picture house for an hour, and then Tony went for Kit's car and chauffeur. He was not returning with us.

"The imposition of fines for such pleasures as made nursery hours their limitation was already burdening his guardian's allowance!" so he informed us.

For the return journey Tarquin sat in front with the driver and Kit and I at the back.

She seemed in high spirits. "You're not so cut-off from the civilised decencies of life as you pretended," she told me. "And you've certainly struck a personality that'll repay study."

"You mean . . ."

"Tarquin—of course. Such a perfectly wonderful name! I kept thinking of gladiators and Nero tuning cymbals to the chant of burning Rome. A bit mixed as metaphors, but you understand. He looks a born fighter. Why on earth did he leave the army?"

I said he would have told her had she asked. Modern warfare had disgusted, not attracted him. His heart was given to cleaner and more wholesome things. She nodded thoughtfully. She

said she had never thought it possible anyone could make farming sound attractive by description. He was going to show her his strange old mansion, and his ploughed acres.

"I shall pop into my land-girl's costume to-morrow morning," she added; "and trudge around to the tune of his explanations. My dear, I seem to have struck a *man* for once in my life!"

The announcement aroused no enthusiasm on my side. Rather a sense of annoyance and coming trouble. Kit was a stormy petrel in every meaning of flirtation. I hated to think of what her visit might mean, since she had taken it into her head to approve of Tarquin.

A *man?* I suppose he did represent that in comparison with the dudes and weaklings and comedians and gamblers she had alluded to as the "Riviera set." But what use to try to captivate such a man? It could only mean trouble and unhappiness.

I am afraid I lent but an inattentive ear to her chatter as we rolled swiftly on through the dark silence of the night. I only remember her impressing upon me that she meant to study farm life and industries with the same enthusiasm she had been wont to display for games and prizes.

To be in the front of everything, to be noticed and applauded and admired, such things were the breath of life to one for ever keen on new emotions.

"You have grown so old and grave," she said that night. "I couldn't have believed even reverse of fortune would have changed anyone so much!"

Something in her look and tone hurt me to tears. I felt so acutely conscious of change; in her, in myself, in every phase and condition of present experience.

I did not shed the tears before her. I kept them for solitude and my own pillow. For the bitterness of memory, and the pain of a strange, jealous suspicion. It had sprung to life at a word; not for me, but for her.

"*Then, I may expect you to-morrow, Lady Katherine?*"

"*You may. But for God's sake do call me Kit!*"

"*Lady—Kit.*"

I had not thought Tarquin's voice could sound so soft . . . or his eyes look so . . .

Next day.

I broke off in a kind of fury with myself for writing anything so unutterably foolish as all this.

In the light of day, its countless cares and duties, sentiment had no place. I accused myself of disloyalty to my friend. I had only myself to blame for bringing her here, and if she chose to play the part of "land-girl," as she had played so many other parts in her time and to the tune of popularity, why should I complain?

Either things happened or—they did not. I could not interfere with her whim any more than I could help admiring her in its equipment.

For next morning I was confronted by a tall slip of a girl in violet tunic and high black leggings and boots. "The costume of Selfridge's lift girls," I told her. She laughed, and said that had been her model.

"Don't be surprised if all the owners of the farms round about congregate to criticise you," I said, dryly. "Really, Kit, it's a bit musical-comedyish for this part of the world!"

"This part of the world will have to accept me as other parts have done," she answered.

So I said no more, even when Dad blinked and murmured astonishment and Boris sniffed contemptuously at the new shiny leggings.

I did wonder what Tarquin would think; but, of course, *that* I should never know. My own duties kept me busy all the morning. I lent her my bicycle to go to the Manor Farm, and with a reminder of luncheon at one o'clock, saw her depart.

Mrs. Malone and Pat were gaping over the railings. Sundry heads and figures appeared at different angles of the road. She rode on coolly, as one too used to observation to resent it. The day was fine, and the sun shining. A faint scent of Spring swept from hidden haunts of wild flowers and golden clumps of gorse.

I returned to my coops and my new batches of chickens. Out they came. Miserable, shaking, weakly—before they dried into warm white fluffiness; pecking and perching on clucking mothers.

All so natural and simple. New life; new energy; new claimants for care and food.

Dad came out to look at the feathered broods; murmured admiration of the coops and houses, and general details.

"Really quite promising; does you credit, Shirley. I am sure you'll succeed in making a profitable business out of it."

He seemed surprised that Kit had deserted me. I told him the Manor Farm had more attractions than a poultry enclosure! He gave me a quick look. I wondered if my voice had been

pitched on a note too sharp. He said nothing more. Only pottered around and watched the various proceedings, and finally surveyed the untidy enclosure of the Malones. This morning it was unusually inglorious. Torn sheets and weird garments were flapping on a clothes-line. A heap of cabbage stalks and potato skins lay awaiting deportation. Old pots and kettles and broken scraps of glass and china adorned the back yard, and Mrs. Malone's voice could be heard either screaming to her dear lodger, or scolding Pat for being in the way of her tub and wringing processes.

Seeing Dad looking at the unsightly boundary, she stopped washing and called to him.

"It'll be the good news to hear we're lavin' this place, won't it, Mister Gayle, sir? Well, that's true for ye; belayve it or not. Goin' back to me own counthry and me own home. That's where I'll be come summer time."

"Going back to Ireland?"

I heard the question, and paused in my occupation of scattering chicken food.

"I am. And glad enough to lave this ugly dirty counthry. Sorra a bit o' good's come to me since I left me own land, and glad me heart will be to see the green fields and the wild hills and the God-sent peace av it all!"

"But—why are you going?"

With much rambling speech and many strange hints she gave him to understand that there were those "who'd be the better for her bein' out av the way!" There were "mysteries that were best left unspoken, and queer tales whispered that maybe one day would enlighten us all as to whom we were trusting and making a hero of." Queer disjointed ramblings poured out with the bitterness of hurt pride and the anger of self-conceived injustice.

I came nearer. I listened, and at last spoke.

"No one wants to get rid of you on purpose! You know that this cottage won't be habitable another winter—but you could change into a better one if you don't want to leave Clan-ditch."

"It's well for ye, Miss Sherry, to be puttin' the wurrds in me mouth, whin by token av the same it's yerself will be the better av me bit o' land—the poor ground though it is. But I've warned ye there's more behind all this than ye choose to see; and if the dead could up and spake we'd be knowin' the rayson o' many things!"

I heard Dad laugh. Mrs. Malone always amused him. But I did not laugh. I could not understand her hints, yet they left a strange sense of uneasiness behind them, to-day, as on other days of which I have written.

"You and yer grand friends, and yer motor cars!" came as a parting shot. "But take my wurrd for it, there's changin' times comin' to ye all as well as to meself. I read it on the cyards last night, and ye'll know before long who was yer friend and who wasn't!"

I turned into the house. Dad followed me.

"I hope we shall have pleasanter neighbours next time," he said.

And I was too tongue-tied and stupid to say that there would not be neighbours at all, seeing that the landlord was anxious to add those neglected acres to our little property.

VII

Same Night.

KIT and Boris returned shortly before luncheon time. Boris had gone to meet her. She told me she had tramped over all that maze of fields and pastures, cultured and uncultured, which meant the Manor Farm.

"A dark, sorrowful place," she called it. "But what a strangely interesting owner. A type . . . as I said before. But hard to place. The 'Yeomen of England' . . . is that it? Only he is not English. Yet not typically foreign. He works in the fields just like his own men, so he told me . . . The house is lovely," she added. "It could be made a dream of a place—by the right woman."

A half-malicious smile curved her lips. A sudden amused glance met my eyes, which were asking more than casual questions.

"He seems crazy about the place," she went on. "He sees it as the finest property in the neighbourhood . . . which it has ceased to be. I can't exactly read motives into his ambition, but undoubtedly the ambition is there."

"Farming is as interesting as any other work—to the man it appeals to," I said.

She was getting out of her land-girl "togs." She threw everything about the room with the carelessness due to possession of a maid. I had already tidied it this morning, so I hinted at the wardrobe as a receptacle.

"Same dear old Martha! Cumbered and troubled about so many things. I can't help it. I was born untidy, and Celeste has spoiled me."

I gathered up discarded garments. Then looked ruefully at boots clogged with mire, and splashed leggings.

"You know there's no one to clean these for you?" I said.

"Do you mean it? Have you no sort of domestic service here?"

"I told you so."

"And you do *everything!* Cook and clean and make beds, and look after the poultry, too? It seems a big order. Tarquin said you were wonderful."

I felt myself flush hotly. "I'm sure he didn't—there's no earthly reason for him to hold such an opinion."

"Oh—well, he does."

She was slipping into a silk princess-petticoat, in some novel fashion that needed no fastening. Then she put on that pretty cinnamon-brown coat frock, and smoothed her hair into closer ripples.

"You'll come to Oxford this afternoon?" she said. "Tony's going to show me over some of the big colleges."

She went on to say that her car would be garaged at Bampton, and the chauffeur had orders to bring it round every afternoon at two o'clock.

"I'm giving you my mornings," she added. "I can help feed the chickens and turn the straw and look for eggs. But the afternoons and evenings are for social matters."

I said I had for so long ignored such matters that I did not care about renewing them. With every word, with every careless gesture, she was putting before me a new personality. Something brilliant and selfish; spoilt by too ready acceptance of whims and freaks.

She seemed so certain of herself. Of her power to charm; her personal graces; her attitude to life. She had won a place for herself in the forefront of that Passing Show which modern recklessness was glorifying.

I felt my own insignificance as a contrast, and told myself with sudden shamefaced regret that I ought never to have given Katherine St. Aubyn such an uncongenial background. Kit

dazzling, warm-hearted, beautiful, had changed into this product of a changed age; applauding its cynicism; copying its theatrical extravagances. Men, as yet, represented merely slaves for conquest; harnessed to changing caprices. She frankly said she had never cared for one among the scores who claimed friendship, or swore undying allegiance. Names I heard that startled me. Great, by reason of ancestry, or achievement. They meant little to her apart from the swelling units of her faithful crowd. She had her own ideas of what to avoid or attract. She revelled in excuses of "temperament" for any exploit more daring or more dangerous than ordinary. It seemed no one's business to rebuke, still less to control her.

A campaign for the forthcoming London season was all cut and dried. Conquests expected, or already assured. Excitements; novelty; all the violent reaction of those painful years revenging itself in a thousand forms of exaggeration.

"You might come up to town for a month?" she invited. "It would do you a world of good!"

I found myself smiling at the idea. Cobweb frocks; fox trots; that new idiotic "jazz," snatched from negro plantations to degrade London drawing-rooms and fashionable dancing halls!

"Do me good?" . . . What good had it done her, or any of the newly-formed sets and circles calling to amusement for forgetfulness of recent horrors?

I have scraps and notes innumerable of two weeks. From them I shall select just sufficient to paint those weeks and their doings into the dull grey canvas that is spread with less brilliant colour.

There seemed little use in pleading duties as excuse for not accompanying Kit in those daily trips, which meant exploiting the University town, and gathering as much local history as was possible from enthusiastic 'grads, or Fellows to whom Tony introduced us. My partner had arranged with Ganders to take over my afternoon duties, and as I heard of thriving fledglings, and saw almost daily additions to our coops, I felt the business was not suffering from neglect. So each day I drove with Kit in her car and, once in Oxford, there was enough to do and to see to charm each hour that claimed us. Dad was persuaded to come in one day and do the honours of his old College. Thus gaining permission for peeps into secret places reserved from the

ordinary visitor, and further illuminating my stock of historical knowledge by actual vision of what it embodied.

That Kit preferred to flutter casually into Hall or Common room, kitchen or Chapel, with a meek escort of fascinated students, is only to say she was "Kit," and found emotion-hunting a more agreeable pastime than listening to feats of memory symbolised by dates. Also she knew so many friends or relatives of the undergrads that it was a difficult matter to avoid claiming their acquaintance.

Certainly a busy time!

We saw all the big Colleges and were lunched and dined by all sorts of "gilded youth." We went into university barges, and were punted over the Isis and the Cher in brief hours of sunshine. We had College life explained as that system of book-learning and sport-loving, industry and idleness, which makes both Oxford and Cambridge so puzzling to the onlooker.

I met queer high-brow youths who talked to Dad of bi-metallism, and had written or debated papers on the origin of Evil. I was introduced to lazy-looking Dons, and queer gowned-and-capped dignitaries, with a fine set of rooms of their own and leisure to enjoy the sedentary joys of academical life. Thirty years, twenty years, sixteen years, and now the changed aspect of a new century and a new order of things!

Modern youth of to-day was more startling and surprising than even in the stormy times of Town-and-Gown free fights. If authority was not defied openly it was ignored secretly. If there was less extravagance it was only because "riotous living" possessed less attraction. To pay one's debts seemed a far better thing than to ruin one's future prospects.

To the youth that had been swept away into the miry floods of warfare had succeeded a youth sobered by remembrance. A few years added to their own and they too would have read a fuller meaning into 1914–18. But school and classroom had held them back until national strife had given place to national upheaval.

For some these walks and river banks were paced by shadows. Haunted by memories of voice or face that now meant only a name on a tablet. Regretful professors spoke such names and lamented over promise nipped in the bud by the adverse winds of fate.

With this more sober-minded contingent I did my share of sight-seeing; kindly received as my illustrious father's only daughter. Questioned as to my special intentions or vocation

Flattered—not a little—by enconiums on common sense and that rare womanly attribute of domesticity.

"*They also serve who—stand aside.*"

No wonder Kit laughed. No wonder I was to her, and her gay crowd of adorers, only "Martha," plodding at her daily chores, "cumbered and caring about many things."

So much for our days. What about the evenings?

Usually we dined in the town. Sometimes a revue at the theatre, or a picture house show claimed an hour or two before our return journey. Kit was not used to early hours, so she tried to teach us bridge as delay for an undesired bedtime. Dad was fascinated by the game. I hated cards, and made a very poor pupil. After two nights she demanded a fourth player, and asked me to invite Tarquin.

"But why? I don't suppose he can play, and it will mean one more to teach."

She said that wouldn't trouble her. Besides, Dad was quite proficient now.

"Write an invite and I'll take it over in the morning," she added and, as Dad eagerly backed up the idea, I wrote it.

I put the note on the wooden slab that did duty as a table in our dwarfed hall. I heard Kit humming the last "fox trot" as she roamed about her room, and throwing her shoes at the wall, a habit of hers when she wanted to attract my attention.

I finished locking-up and extinguishing lights. I was very tired. In no mood for confidences. But the worst of a bungalow is the close proximity of rooms and the difficulty of keeping to oneself. I slipped into my dressing-gown and went to her.

She was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her feet bare; a filmy wrap of chiffon and lace thrown over her shoulders.

"Do sit down and have a chat, Sherry," she said. "I feel I can't sleep for hours."

I felt inclined to say that I had been up at six o'clock that morning, and had had a busy afternoon, and was not disinclined for bed, but I reminded myself she was my guest. Also I recalled scraps of confidences, interludes, that seemed more like the old intimacy. I hailed any attempt at renewed confidence as a return to the old days.

She lit a cigarette and then drew up her knees on the bed and sat hunched there in the queer attitude she often affected.

"I wish you smoked—"

I shook my head. "No good, my dear. I never have and never shall."

I walked up to the low basket chair and sat down. "Anything special?" I asked.

She laughed and blew a whiff of smoke across to me. "Yes. Tell me the ghost story."

I stared. "Ghost story? . . . What do you mean?"

"Sly! You've kept it to yourself. But murder will out, and so will ghosts. I've heard about the old gentleman who *walks*. Lovely creepy idea, Sherry! I'd love to see him. Will you come out one night?"

I frowned angrily.

"Indeed I'll not do anything of the sort! It's all silly gossip, retailed at the village store . . . How did you hear it?"

"Ah—how? You'd like to know?"

I threw my mind back to any acquaintances she might have made. Mrs. Malone—Pat—Ganders. Any of these might have told her.

"Well, I don't believe in it," I said. "Foolish, idle talk. I suppose it was the Irish boy?"

She nodded. "Yes—this morning. They're going away, I hear."

I said I was glad of it. The cottage and yard were an eyesore. She returned to the subject of the ghost. She repeated my account written to her at the time of the accident to our old Melchizedek.

"Weird," she described it. "But it seems just the sort of story for that old Manor House. Has Tarquin heard it yet?"

I hated her to use that name so familiarly. I said coldly I didn't know. It was not likely he would tell me if he had.

"I suppose you're sure it *was* an accident? . . . I mean . . . was there anyone who wished that old man ill? To whom a stumble and a knock on the head would have meant deliverance from a—threat, shall we say?"

I said coldly that I had other things to do than weave melodrama around sordid facts.

"I suppose you only look at facts? I never could have believed anyone could have changed so much in a short time!"

"Four years of war and two years of peace mean something in one's life," I said.

"I shared them; less boisterously than yourself, but still I did things—until I had a breakdown."

I drew the chair a little nearer to the bed. She gave a sudden shiver and, stooping, drew the gay-coloured eiderdown about her, and leant back against the pillows.

"Kit, I didn't mean to reproach. I know how ill you were; what it cost you. But that's what makes me wonder how you could have let all that time—change you so?"

"You do find me changed? Your first acknowledgment, Sherry!"

"How can two walk together unless they agree?" I quoted absently.

"And we've quite fallen out of step. We don't agree about anything. I can no more enter into your life and feelings than you can into mine."

I knew that. The bluntly-spoken truth scarcely hurt me now. The little stabs and snubs of this past fortnight had in some way deadened susceptibility. Round most schoolgirl friendships one weaves a web of self-illusion. Also in those friendships there is always one who worships and one who *is* worshipped. Kit had been a universal favourite. She had carried her longing for appreciative admiration into her new life. She had been flattered, spoilt ever since her introduction to society. Now, after a lapse of years, when we met again, how was it possible to recapture past sensations?

I had felt I could not do so that first day. I had felt it more and more as time went on. Apart from the brilliance of her worldly setting Katherine St. Aubyn was less a wonder than a discomfort. I hated myself for thinking it. I hated the sensation of fickleness which annotated the change in my regard for her. But, to be honest with myself was a necessity and I could not pretend feelings if I did not recognise their reality.

She suddenly went on talking in an odd disjointed fashion. She did not wait for answers . . . just talked, in pure recklessness. It seemed to me there must be something behind it all, behind the odd opinions, the mocking indifference to what I had supposed were still moral conventions. Art, religion, emotion were all touched by the same scathing sarcasms. The same affected indifference to *reality* of meaning.

I listened silently as she smoked those opium-tainted cigarettes. The atmosphere was heavy with their sickly odour. Her eyes were dilated and yet drowsy. She seemed to enjoy saying dreadful things of men and women she knew. "Of the whole

crew I don't know one who leads a normally decent life. It's as if . . . well, as if the lid had been taken off their real selves and they were glorying in the revelation. Not to fear anything . . . well, perhaps, there's a wholesome side to that. For my part, I only want to meet some crude flesh-and-blood manhood. Something strong enough to resist, and proud enough to acknowledge conquest. A man. I don't find them in the empty-headed crowd who openly adore me . . . If I had an ideal I might contrast it with your Tarquin—so cold, and unapproachable. I should like to see him enslaved by a woman . . . body and soul at her mercy . . . weak and suppliant . . . A modern Samson . . . I wonder would it be worth while to try?"

She looked at me through half-closed eyes. "What would you bet, Sherry, against my getting him to London . . . this season? I'll ask you, too, if you'll come. We're rather inclined to let ourselves go after the long restraint. Balls; night clubs; *thés dansants*; theatricals; faro tables! Ascot once again. I'd love to see you amidst it all!"

"That—you never will," I said. "I couldn't live that sort of life. It isn't worth while; not in the position I hold. It's different for you. You were born into it."

"Queer, that contrast of social positions," she murmured sleepily.

"One inheriting, and one seeking for place. Plenty of that nowadays, my dear. The shoddy millionaires and profiteers; the semi-foreign aristocrat cringing before the national Moloch of naturalisation! . . . Oh—a pretty show our modern Vanity Fair, and a worthless pack of puppets to dance in and out of the pageant."

I rose to say good-night. I wanted to hear no more. She had made me strangely unhappy.

As I stood there she opened those drowsy lids and surveyed me.

"I suppose you're what they call a good girl, Sherry. In fact I know you are. I wonder what or *who* is responsible for the contrast between us. Have you ever reflected on that fortuitous circumstance of two people meeting and mating in order that some strange soul should be sheathed with a human body and set agoing to work out its destiny in this queer world!"

I stared at her; confused less by the words than the train of speculation they evoked.

"Birth, and Life, and Death . . . " she went on in a

hoarse whisper. "And that's all, Sherry. Believe me or not—that's all!"

If my lips were cold in that good-night kiss—which convention ordained between friends—is it any wonder?

VIII

More Fragments.

WHAT next?

How to weave these disjointed fragments into a consistent whole? How to speak of the days following that bedroom talk as if they were mere ordinary days of ordinary human duties?

I recognised a sense of pervading restlessness. In my father; in myself; in little echoes of talk and laughter that filled our tiny domicile. And amidst the echoes a flitting figure, and a face radiantly insolent of its own charm.

I plodded through accustomed tasks. Glad sometimes of the invasion of the commonplace. It could not check thought, but it could distract it with other meanings.

Those little golden bunches of new-fledged chicks demanding extra care, and prepared food; those anxious mothers, those patient brooders, I welcomed them all as claims upon a too readily divided attention. I found myself making them excuse for afternoons when the invitation of the car sounded in its owner's voice. I refused trips to Oxford and the districts around. I said I must stay at home. And the staying involved me in many duties. Preparation of supper dishes. *Hors d'œuvres*; sandwiches; savoury eggs, fruit salad, jellies. For often Tony would come back with Kit, and almost every evening Tarquin appeared. He was not an enthusiast for bridge. He had learnt it so quickly that I could not evade a suspicion it had already been studied. Sometimes Tony brought a college friend to take a hand, with a sublime indifference to fines for late hours. On such occasions Kit and Tarquin would sit out, or smoke in the verandah if the night happened to be mild.

I watched the growing intimacy between them with strange misgiving. I felt sure no one could resist the fascinations of Kit when she chose to exercise them.

Why she should do so in this instance I could not determine, save by recalling her queer confidences. He was the type of strong, determined purpose; the type that used the life force as a lever for life exploiting.

There was no "pose" about him; no assumption of being other than the man who worked because he loved work, and had set before himself a goal to be reached by self-exertion.

What could they talk about, I wondered, sitting sometimes in conscious inattention to my laid down hand; listening to Tony and his friend, Gilbert Somers, arguing over some foolish "declaration" that spelt failure with every vanishing trick.

And presently they would be recalled to "cut in" once more, and I would watch the glow in Tarquin's eyes and the firm set of his lips as he "passed" or declared.

Then I would slip off for supper preparations—set out on Dad's writing table in a corner of the room. A simple matter of plate and fork and "help yourself," which Kit declared was preferable to any restaurant meal. Very gay and cheery those informal suppers. Dad came out surprisingly as host, and Tony—well, he was always Tony. I wondered often if any troubles or trials would ever come his way, chill his enthusiasms. It was hard to think of him as anything but the dear, foolish, frivolous boy I had known and laughed with and at so often.

The bridge only lasted from eight to ten. Then after half an hour of eating, drinking, and chattering, the party would break up on account of the "boys," as Dad called them.

Of exploits of motor-bike and sidecar I hardly like to speak. I only marvel Tony has not killed himself and his friend, too, by a partiality for records which I am sure neither public nor police could have shared!

Tarquin was always the last to leave. He came on his bicycle and it would stand in the outhouse until he returned.

Sometimes I and Boris went with him to fetch it. Sometimes Kit followed.

Last night she said abruptly that she'd wish him good-bye instead of good-night.

"I'm leaving to-morrow," she added. "But remember—I'll expect to see you in London—before long."

It was too dark to see his face. I only noticed that he stood very still, as if thinking of what that casual invitation meant.

"To-morrow," he said at last. "You really leave to-morrow. I didn't know it was so soon."

"I'm not sure I haven't outstayed my welcome," she said. "I came for a week and I've stayed two. Well—" she held out her hand—"my respects to the ghost, if you meet it," she added flippantly.

He stepped back a pace. He did not take her hand.

"*Ghost?*" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard of the Gentleman who Walks? I wish I could have seen him. Midnight and a moon are the conditions. Are they suitable to-night, do you think? That's what they say in *séances*. I've seen ghosts there . . . materialised muslin shrouds which the medium manipulates; not quite convincing. But I'm frightfully keen on seeing a *real* one if possible."

He bent down to light his lamps.

"I—I can't understand you," he muttered hoarsely. "This is the first time I've heard of such nonsense. Who told you?"

"Several people. Those Irish folk yonder; and Ganders, the useful man; and Shirley here."

He turned to me. But the night, though starlit, was too dark for me to see his face.

"You too? . . . *You* encourage this sort of gossip, Miss Shirley?"

"I do not," I said quickly. "I've always contradicted it."

"But there *is* a rumour—something to contradict? Who could have invented it in the first instance?"

We were silent. I heard him move the bicycle impatiently. "I hope," he said, "you'll continue to contradict it. A great deal of harm can be done by idle talk. And this is so—so ridiculous!"

He wheeled the machine round, taking the side path to the front gate. Kit called to him—

"You've not said good-bye . . . or are you coming to see me off to-morrow?"

He paused.

"Perhaps; yes—I will."

He mounted and rode off. We went into the house.

I had to clear away the supper things and wash them up. Dad was putting away the cards. He looked up at Kit.

"How we shall miss you," he said.

"I'm glad of that. Shows I'm appreciated. I've enjoyed my visit immensely, though I'm afraid I've given Shirley a lot of extra trouble."

"The labour we delight in physics pain," quoted Dad, irrelevantly.

"Or words to that effect," she laughed. "Observe—our Martha has retired. I'll go and help her . . . A parting kiss and then—"

She touched his cheek lightly with her lips and then followed me into the kitchen.

"Do go to bed," I implored. "You've not packed yet, and if you leave everything till to-morrow—"

"My train isn't till twelve-thirty," she said; "and the car will be here at eleven-thirty. Plenty of time. Besides, I've got heaps of things to say to you. It's our last night. Are you a little bit sorry?"

"Of course I'm sorry. It's been lovely to have you, and—"

"And I've tried to give you a good time, haven't I?"

"Indeed, yes. The only regret—"

"That hateful—afterwards. I shall taste it, too. So you wear an apron, Martha?"

"Of course. I should splash my dress."

I was pouring out hot water into an enamel basin. She watched me with an amused smile. Then lit a cigarette. "Shall I dry as you wash them?"

She flicked off a glass-cloth from the line on which it had been drying. I let her do as she wished. Only another whim, this pretence of helpfulness. It resulted in a broken plate before I hinted that I'd rather be unassisted.

Then she said what I knew she had been wanting to say.

"Tarquinius *will* come up to London, Sherry. What do you think of that?"

I said there was no reason why he shouldn't do so. It wouldn't be the first time. Already I knew of two visits.

"Ah—but they were business! This one will be entirely different."

She left the scullery and went into the kitchen and sat down by the fire.

"This is the nicest room in your doll's house," she said. "It's here you used to sit and write those lovely yarns to me, isn't it?"

"Yes."

The door stood open, and I could talk to her while finishing my task.

"What a strange life it seems . . . and yet . . . not so strange, now that I've seen it. And you've fitted yourself into it amazingly. When I first heard, I thought you were mad. Then I thought you'd regret. Do you, Sherry? Are there times when *cui bono* seems the only thing to ask of all the work,

and the drudgery, and the hateful stale monotony of days spent as your days were—and will be again ? "

I noted that she attributed any change in those days to her own visit.

To make her understand that excitements were less a necessity than an interruption of duties would have meant a long argument. And I hated arguments. I had proved their uselessness. So few can respond with level temper to any difference of opinion. Also it seems to me a mere glorification of vanity to interfere with another person's freedom of thought by impressing one's own theories or convictions upon them. We all do it in some measure. Consciously or unconsciously we take a mean advantage of claims of affection ; claims of position ; relative situations of teacher and taught. That advantage consists in enforcing our own ideas of what should be thought, or said, or done ; putting personal authority before individual right.

Friendship had to be long-enduring, and love all-forgiving—(if not divinely patient)—in order to sustain the weight of interference.

I let Kit assure herself she had been all that was charming, helpful and unselfish. I had no doubt she meant to be all this and more, for mere pity of a situation she deplored.

But I had no use for her pity. I had set my shoulder to the wheel, and must push forward.

I stood and looked at her sitting there, an incongruous figure amidst such homely surroundings. She was wearing a black transparent frock that left her lovely throat bare, and fell back from her shoulders in a loose drapery that alternately shrouded or revealed the slender arms.

" I'm quite sure you don't mean it, Sherry," she said, in answer to my stumbling sentences. " You're the worst actress of sincerity I've ever come across. But we've been frank enough with each other to acknowledge change. It was only to be expected. At first I hoped it was only the change of environment, but I soon learnt it had gone deeper than that."

" There's so little use in talking," I said, wearily. " When a thing has happened it *has* happened. You can't imagine that you've only imagined it."

" No," she agreed ; " you can't. But I'm sorry for you, dear old thing. When I've once cared for anyone I hate to think of misunderstandings . . . drifting apart . . . *Do* come and stay with me in town, and let us try and get back to the old days and ways ! *Do*."

I shook my head.

" Impossible ! I can't leave Dad alone, and there will be a great deal more to do with the poultry as the months go on. I must be here. I'm determined to give the thing a fair trial. If I threw all responsibility aside and went gadding about with you I should feel I was acting very selfishly—leave alone that—change—in myself of which you spoke. It would prevent me from enjoying what you find so easy to enjoy."

She lit a cigarette and drew me into the bedroom to " help her pack."

It was no easy matter, for her clothes were scattered here and there, and had to be collected and folded into the small compass of a suitcase and dressing bag.

" You are a spoilt child of Fortune ! " I said. " Do you want to take your Selfridge-girl ' rig out ' with you ? It has fulfilled its purpose, hasn't it ? "

She looked at the crumpled tunic and knickers with a slight frown.

" You think I had a special purpose ? " she asked.

I told her I was sure of it. That she could not avoid seeking the sensational side of any new situation.

" Then my *rôle* is to dress the part, not to play it ? "

" I think you do both admirably," I said.

At which she snatched the land-girl's outfit from my hands, rolled it into a bundle, and tossed it into a corner.

" Give it to Mother Malone," she said. " She can make it into a coat for her ' bhoy ' ! "

" The boots ? " I faltered. " Those lovely boots and leggings ! They must have cost— "

" Oh ! they did . . . But I don't want them, unless I pay you another visit ? "

I flushed ; conscious that I had omitted the courtesy of a second invitation.

" I'll keep them for that," I said. " Put carefully away and oiled so that they shan't crack. When will you come again Kit ? "

She looked at me, faintly smiling. " If I said when you *wanted* me I'm afraid my suit would have mouldered away ! I'll come when the mood takes me. If not to you, to Oxford. There's always Tony, you see."

I tried to laugh, but I feared my expression was out of control. Still, I had a standard of loyalty. I wanted to keep it uplifted.

" You'll come *here*, Kit, and you know you'll be welcome. It

must seem a poor, humble sort of place—and life—but I warned you . . . ."

"And painted it honestly. You would do that, Sherry. I give you all credit. Believe it, or not, I *have* enjoyed my stay with you. It's been a refreshing experience. Life has a purpose for you. It's not a pretence. Not the chatter of the Bandar-Log . . .

> "Here we sit in a branchy row
> Thinking of beautiful things we know,
> Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do . . ."

That's the difference between us, Sherry. I dream of them. You—*do* them."

"A very poor effort, as yet."

"A very great effort, and a wonderful success. Dad has talked to me, on occasions."

"Well, please don't talk *of* me," I said. "There—I've packed all those things, and I believe the lid *will* shut down!"

I tried it. "Yes! But how on earth you managed to get the 'land-girl' in puzzles me!"

"Celeste is a wonderful packer."

She sat down on the bed and put her hands behind her head. 'To think this time to-morrow I'll be lady's-maided, and *coiffured*, and war-painted! What's the greatest thing in life, Sherry?"

"Contrasts," I said quietly. "The way they happen, and the satisfaction they bring."

"They mayn't always bring satisfaction."

"In this particular instance I have no doubt," I said.

That closed our evening's talk as far as it approached confidence. There might have been another subject she would have liked to discuss, but I shied nervously at any approach to it.

Perhaps she recognised the fact. At all events she did not persist, and returned my hurried good-night with an acceptance of what it evaded.

The next morning she left. It was a cold, drizzling day. Everything looked dismal, and Dad's face shared the general gloom.

"I shall miss you more than I can say," he told her. "You brought such life and animation and zest into everything. Do

say you'll come again, unless, of course, you've been frightfully bored ? "

She assured him she hadn't. She wished luck to the " Guide-Book," and the poultry, and said she'd send me the last thing in incubators as a birthday present.

And so we parted.

I've tried to describe her. I've tried to describe what those two weeks represented. I feel I have failed. The canvas is blurred ; the colours uneven ; the composition all wrong.

Ah well ! A drone cannot impersonate a butterfly !

IX

More Entries—March.

I DROPPED back into the old routine with a sense of relief. It had been no easy matter to live up to Kit's energies and claims.

The next excitement was the departure of Mrs. Malone and Pat and the deaf lodger. She insisted on taking all her belongings, rubbish or not. She had a small motor lorry to transport them to Bristol. From there she was going by steamer to Ireland. I had tried to persuade her to have a " jumble sale," but I might as well have pleaded to the scattered poultry. Such bundles and broken boxes and odds and ends of furniture and bedding ! She bargained with me to take over her stock of fowls, and, of course, got the best of the bargain. However, I consoled myself with the thought that they might improve under better conditions. On the morning of her departure Dad and I bade her farewell to the tune of much lamentation, and yet the confidence of a far warmer welcome awaiting her in her own country, when she should arrive.

Pat was still strange ; still furtive. Still muttering of " things he'd seen," and things that " could be known if anyone chose to speak of them."

I paid no attention. Indeed, I was so thankful to be rid of them both that all my energies went to speeding their preparations.

Towards the end of the packing up, Tarquin suddenly appeared. From what he said and did as a directing force I gathered

he was paying for the transport. He said little to me until the lorry was loaded, and Mrs. Malone and Pat accommodated with seats by the driver. The lodger sat on a chair in the vehicle itself. Her face expressed a certain pride at this importance, for quite a crowd were in the road; shouting farewells as the man sparked up his engine.

Mrs. Malone held a handkerchief to her eyes yet bore herself with the dignity of an exiled empress. My last glimpse of her was waving the handkerchief to a crowd of cheering villagers and—the solitary policeman.

I could not say why that official figure, standing a little apart, watching this queer spectacle, should have brought a flood of uncomfortable memories to my mind! But it did.

There seemed something ominous in that watchful immobility; in the calmness with which a notebook was produced and something entered. I found myself wondering what the entry was . . . date of departure? . . . three less of the village population?

Tarquin had gone into the cottage. I stood at the gate. Presently I saw the policeman coming towards me.

He touched his hat. "Excuse me, Miss. Those Irish folk lived here next door to you, didn't they?"

(As he knew the fact as well as I did, why did he ask?)

"Yes," I said.

"Might I enquire, respectful, have you taken down their new address?"

"New—oh, they've gone to Ireland!"

His hand went to his pocket. Then paused. "A longish way, and a queer onsettled country. Them Sheenfayers, as they call theirselves, be bent on destroyin' of law and order."

"I expect Mrs. Malone will keep clear of them," I said, and then turned quickly as I heard Tarquin's step.

He came up to the gate. "Anything wrong, Marlott?"

"No, sir; not to say wrong, sir. I was merely inquiring if the said parties had left an address so as to be found should occasion require."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded Tarquin, sharply.

"Well, sir, 'tis only my duty to keep an eye on suspicious folks, and I've never rightly assured myself as all came out as oughter to have come out. Didn't the Inspector himself caution me while in commendation of the way I'd done my duty. 'Keep your eye on 'em, Marlott,' he says; 'keep your eye on 'em, for

maybe,' he says, ' there'll be more heard o' this matter than now seems called for.' "

" What matter ? "

" The inquest, sir. That same unpleasant and discomfortin' bizness."

" But why bring it up ? . . . That's over and done with."

" Over it is, sir. But done with ? Maybe not, so to say—altogether. I hadn't meant to say nought to you, sir ; bein' —well, so close o' kinship to deceased. But since you ask—maybe you've heard o' what folks do call ernonymous letters ? "

" Anonymous letters ! "

We both said it . . . then our eyes met. I saw his lips whiten as if under stress of emotion.

" The same meanin' no doubt. Well, I've had one, sir. In fact to be exackt, I've had two. O' course I've said nothin'. I was learnt from childhood's days to keep a quiet tongue in my head, as is the wisdom o' Solomon. But when on top o' that queer circumstance comes this here exodus as 'tis called in Bible words, then I thinks to myself a precautionary measure would ha' been to take the future address o' those parties as were—as were ex-oding."

He regarded us triumphantly after this lucid explanation.

Tarquin's frown was not encouraging.

" For goodness' sake stop interfering with what's past and done with ! The whole matter of the inquest was settled once and for all by the verdict. If malicious or gossiping folk hereabouts are raising any doubts as to that verdict— "

Marlott interposed eagerly—" That's what they be, sir ! Sayin' as how 'twere all too hurried, and there oughter have been more witnesses. And the gossip comes, sir, from some as sat on that 'ere jury. Meanin' no disrespeck, sir, to what was done in the name o' the Law, there was your own man, Mr. Jassey, raisin' objeckshuns. And when he came down here a month ago, he called around to see me personal, and the questions as *he* put . . . Well, sir, no one out o' Scotland Yard could have stood it and not said something contradikshus ! And the last words—' Keep yer eye on them folks livin' here around, and don't let no one go without leavin' an address ! "

Tarquin laughed contemptuously.

" Jassey ! . . . Oh ! And he said that ? He gave no reason, I suppose ? "

" Not, so to say—valid, sir. Just casual and I made a note o' same. Then I was took by surprise this mornin' to see some o' your tenants departin' as it were."

Here I interposed. I told him that the facts of Mrs. Malone's departure had been common knowledge for weeks past. He said that was no doubt true, but no *dates* had been affirmed. He had taken the precaution of entering this special one in his notebook, but in the surprise of the moment forgot to ask for the Irish address.

" Oh—I know that! Don't worry," said Tarquin. " But I'm too thankful to be rid of mother and son to want them back again. And take my advice, Marlott. Don't listen to so much foolish talk, and don't talk so much yourself! "

" I—sir! I talk! I hopes I knows my duty, and no one has ever said different! "

He drew himself up with offended dignity. I saw Tarquin slip something into his hand, and the dignity became cordial once again.

" My best respecks to you, sir, and to you, miss, and depend on't I'll do my best to disencourage these talkers. All the same, when it comes to letters—ernonymous, as I said— "

" Throw them in the fire! " I exclaimed. " What people are afraid to say openly has no value as evidence."

" Right you may be, Miss, and I accepts the hint. Only, if them as wants to rake up dead bones, so to say, begins a-writin' me again, what am I to do? "

" Come to me," said Tarquin, sharply. " And keep a close tongue for everyone else."

After an uncomfortable silence Tarquin began to speak of intentions regarding the cottage.

" It is a pigstye—a disgrace. It must come down." He pointed to the untidy patch of ground. " That, too, could be fertilised, as I've said before. Wouldn't you rather have something green and cultured to look at? "

" Naturally," I said. " But there's the question of being able to buy in this addition? "

" It could be arranged; paying by instalments; I would meet your father's wishes in any possible way."

" Of course, it would be a wonderful improvement," I said.

My mind took in every detail. Saw the ragged fences down, the joining up of yard to yard. The new green sward of frontage, the joy of those apple and plum trees as a boundary. I

would relegate the poultry to our separate enclosure ; raze that tumble-down fowl house ; abolish an unsavoury manure heap

He watched my glance, following its meaning. I had no doubt that he, too, saw the magic of change and longed for its accomplishment. In the waiting pause for what Spring might show of his own improvements he could set to work on this new reconstruction.

He wasted no time, but went in to see Dad and discuss the matter. I returned to my duties of feeding and watering the new arrivals ; all happy and healthy, if vigorous scratching or playing hide and seek under their mothers' ruffled plumage were significant of enjoyment. A brief vision of sunshine made all the difference to their new existence as to my more matured ones. I went to and fro, busy and amused, trying to picture my little poultry farm as one of those glorified " holdings " I had seen in the Poultry papers. Trying to anticipate prosperity, and the permanent engagement of Ganders as a sign of it. With him as *aide-de-camp* everything was possible. Additional ground would mean additional stock, and additional work. I should need a capable assistant. I resolved to ask him to accept that post at the first opportunity. Meanwhile, I told myself, I must make up for that idle fortnight by renewed zeal.

Tarquin came out to give me the result of his interview with father.

It was as satisfactory as I had hoped.

The new addition would be completed as speedily as possible, and become a part of the Silverhatch allotment at a monthly rental until Dad chose to pay off the full amount.

Our landlord again surveyed what the present " run " signified, and compared it with what another year would represent.

" You're not tired of the venture, yet ? " he asked me.

I assured him I wasn't. I was just beginning to realise its importance, and its possibilities. He said, hesitatingly, that those past weeks might have changed my opinion as a result of changed conditions of living. I knew what he meant. Kit's appearance on any scene could never go unchronicled. I said that sort of life was all very well as an interlude. One could not accept it as the only meaning of life.

" But your friend does ? "

I hinted that between the positions of Lady Katherine St. Aubyn and Shirley Gayle, poultry farmeress, there stretched a wide gulf of division.

"At present—perhaps. But you were once in the same position. I can't help thinking you must regret?"

I wondered if Kit had hinted at anything of the sort. I could not recall any admission on my part that would have given her the right to do so. I asked abruptly if he had seen her off at the station. He did not deny going, but muttered somewhat indistinctly of a crowd, and difficulty of approach. I gathered from his stumbling words that Tony and his friends had assembled at the send-off of the popular beauty, and the air had been rent with invitations for her return for Eights' Week.

"You will, of course, go to that also," he said. "You'll enjoy it. Your friend Tony is sure to do the honours otherwise I would have asked—"

He hesitated. I found myself wishing he had finished his sentence. But he said no more. Only turned abruptly to fetch his bicycle.

Boris followed him without apology to me.

. . . . . .

I have written long and much this evening. It is pleasant to have leisure and peace around me once more. It may not seem very friendly to say so, and I am a little ashamed of my own candour. But then, I tell myself, only my own eyes see the confession, and, if one cannot be truthful to oneself, why keep a diary, or trouble to commemorate one's uneventful existence!

Thinking back on all that has happened brings to my mind the events of this morning.

The departure of my discomforting neighbours assumed a new significance. Why had it concerned Marlott? And who could be the writer of those anonymous letter of which he had spoken?

He had not said what they contained, but I guessed they had something to do with that tragic death of Tarquin's father.

I asked myself whose business it could possibly be to rake up that story again. To set members of the jury talking; to induce an interest in the movements of our small community which made any change of address important.

It all seemed very mysterious. There had been no question of any violence at the time of the inquest, and to hint that death was *not* due to accident seemed to imply a motive for an apparent accident.

Could that hateful lawyer be at work again? Was his enmity to Tarquin reason enough for disturbing our peace of mind? But then the letters . . .

I felt sure *they* could not be his work, because in my opinion the law was at once too upright and too dignified a profession for the employment of unworthy means even for a worthy end. Of course, there were exceptions. I had never liked Mr. Gideon Jassey, but the fact of personal animus ought not to influence reason.

Again and again I thought of words he had let fall; of Tarquin's annoyance at his interference; of Marlott's queer hints. I grew vaguely uncomfortable. I had hoped Mrs. Malone's departure might have instituted an epoch of peace and pleasantness.

It would be strange if it only inaugurated a fresh trouble.

I had been writing slowly . . . thoughtfully; my pen giving transcription to my mind's perplexities. I paused—hearing the parlour door open and Dad's footsteps crossing the passage. He looked in and saw me writing.

"Busy, child? I wanted a word with you."

"Come in and sit down," I said, pushing my papers to one side, and throwing a sheet of blotting-paper on the top of them.

He sat down and took an envelope out of his pocket.

"This came by the evening post . . At first I thought I wouldn't tell you, but really . . . well, it's given me a most uncomfortable evening. I felt as if I must."

He took a sheet of paper from the envelope, and laid it before me on the table.

"Read that," he said.

I looked at the words. Ill spelt. Blotted. Here they are.

Sir. This to say to throw your mind back to facks seemin axadent to one in yer nayborhood as happnt larst December. Was it axadent or was poor old gent found and left lyin as may be after wound to head afforsaid. Wound not explayned at inquiary of same derceesed. There be folks as talk of surspicious circumstances not brought before coroner at time o' same.

respeckful yours

an oneasy Witness.

I put down the sheet and looked at father.

"What a farrago of nonsense!"

Then I remembered Marlott's words of the morning, and his acknowledgment of anonymous letters.

"Perhaps he sent this to you!" I exclaimed.

"He?—Who?"

"Marlott, the policeman. He told us this morning that he had received anonymous letters on the same subject. Perhaps this is one, and he sent it."

"Why should he send it—to me?"

I did not answer. The idea seemed rather far-fetched. But my brain was in a whirl. The hateful suggestions in village gossip; the alarms of "ghost walking," the strange hints of the policeman—all rushed back to memory. *Someone was doing this.* Someone was trying to make mischief and rouse suspicions. I asked myself who was sufficiently interested in the matter to work in the dark and create an atmosphere of distrust around the owner of the Manor Farm?

I took up the letter and the envelope and examined them carefully.

"Postmark of the next village," I said. "Yet the writer must have lived here?"

"Then it wasn't Marlott."

"He might have posted it in another place to divert suspicion."

I read the signature again—"*An oneasy Witness.*" There were so few witnesses. The case was so simple. Ourselves. Pat Malone's statement. The men who had found the body. Marlott. Tarquin.

One after another I recalled and discarded them.

Then I turned impatiently to Dad. "Oh, throw the thing in the fire and don't think of it!" I exclaimed. "We know perfectly well what happened, and how it happened. It was just an accident that but for the snow would not have terminated fatally. The wound in the head was caused by striking a sharp stone. That was agreed. No more need be said. Who could—who would—"

I broke off. I felt I was becoming incoherent.

I saw Dad take the envelope and the letter, and put them into his coat pocket.

"You—you're going to keep them?" I faltered.

"I'm going to try and find out whose interest it is to rake up this unfortunate circumstance," he said. "Trying to turn an accident into a crime is a very serious matter."

X

A "Nuit blanche"—and Afterwards.

THE echo of those words sounded through long hours of a wakeful night. They haunted my dreams, which wound between the grotesque and the tragic.

That patriarchal visage of the old Melchizedek would suddenly appear from behind a door, or look through a window as I sat writing. Then I would start into wakefulness; my forehead damp, my heart beating wildly. Once I heard Boris barking violently. I wondered what had disturbed him. Since the departure of the Malones our bungalow stood in a somewhat isolated position. Our neighbours on the other side were some distance off.

I rose and went to the window and drew aside the curtains.

All was dark, and misty. A few pale stars glimmered. The grassy space between house and poultry-enclosure stretched dimly amidst shadows to where the coops and hen houses stood as advertised industry.

I called to the dog through the open window, and he came quickly towards me. I leant out and stroked his head, and asked him the reason of his alarm? He stood, a little restless; his ears alert; his head turning from right to left.

I bade him be quiet; then closed the window and went back to bed. I felt strangely tired. In another three hours I must be up and busy over household duties. I tried to be philosophical. "Why worry over other people's affairs," I said to myself. "Isn't it enough to manage your own?"

But it is easier to ask "Why?" than to account for the persistence of a troublesome thought.

The passage of the next three or four days marked time for memories of this "*nuit blanche.*" They have brought nothing eventful or even interesting.

The work of demolishing the Malone's tumble-down cottage goes on, but Tarquin has not appeared. Dad is highly interested in the performance.

The men work quickly and well. The sense of space and cleanliness produced by disappearance is all for the good of our little property. There is nothing now between us and the stretch of market-garden holding of an enterprising horticulturist, who supplies the neighbourhood with vegetables, and

grows tomatoes and even grapes under a limited space of glass.

Such materials as were any use have been carted to the far end of the ground for erection of fresh hen-houses. But where the cottage stood will, I hope, be turned into a space of grass and flower beds, opening into our enclosure instead of being hedged off. The improvement will be wonderful and, as Tarquin said, render to our holding a greater value.

Dad and I walked to and fro in self-congratulation. We pictured the joys of coming Summer with that content of landowners which a cruel taskmaster has thought fit to tax into discontent!

Even so, even with impoverished fortunes, and the vague assurance of a score or two of "Mrs. Waddles'," we were happy. We had an assured resting place, and a promising industry. Could Fate harm us?

I have seen nothing of Tony since Kit's departure. He had spoken of "work," so I imagine he must be in the grip of a tutor; forced at last to do something to explain his presence at the University. The present term would not finish till the beginning of July, so he had time to accomplish something. What I had seen of leisured youth, and heard of sport enthusiasts, still kept me wondering.

All that motoring, riding, cricketing, rowing, tennis-playing, boxing, club-frequenting, which made up so large a portion of undergraduate life, must be a severe handicap to intellectual pursuits! The general opinion seemed to be that greater honour attended the Oxford Blue than the Oxford Don! The acquisition of Cups or Sports-awards was more commendable than a degree for which one "stodged" and not infrequently cribbed. The championship of river or cricket-field set Kipling's satire on "flannelled fools" to the stirring cheers of popularity. Why worry over "Honours" or "Firsts" or "Seconds," when the sports columns of the daily press acclaimed you hero in 'Varsity or County!

Something to this effect had voiced the opinions of Tony's friends, and Kit's côterie of admirers. I had listened with ever-growing wonder, for the more I saw of the Colleges the more I envied those whose names bracketed the passage-ways of rooms, or flourished in topical satire in the columns of the University Reviews.

Dad took the *Isis* occasionally. He still believed in the

Union as a school for the political aspirant. The forcing ground of unfledged debates. He sought for rising talent in the cock-sure editorials which Young Oxford penned and Older Oxford satirised. He chuckled over attempts at literary journalism, and read the Oxford accent into the Oxford erudition.

"Clever, but uninspiring" was his verdict.

I waited to pass it on to Tony when he should entertain us with another of his contributions to the debates.

In these four days I have kept closely to the house and the poultry yard. I had to make up for wasted time. Besides, there was no longer a temptation to run into the city on slight inducements.

Kit had sent a brief word of thanks for her visit, and apology for trouble it must have occasioned. She did not say whether Tarquin had been one of the crowd to see her off.

I put her letter aside. The desire to answer it as of old, to pour out the events and happenings of my uneventful days, no longer inspired me.

I suppose one can't help one's feelings changing. She had come into my life in days of whole-hearted enthusiasm. Had dropped out of it in times of serious trouble. Had returned. Had faced me with that sense of *unreality* which made her very brilliance a sham, and the brilliance left me admiring yet undazzled. I had sought for a friend who should understand my need of friendship. I sought in vain. The selfishness of the egoist is the crudest selfishness of life; playing to every god of Chance its pitiful little comedy of importance.

Of course, Kit was important—as a contrast to myself. Position, wealth, intelligence, all conspired to put her in the limelight of notoriety. And when we met again, I could see only contrast as link of union. All that meant sympathy and comprehension had vanished.

I write this *of* her, not *to* her, with some sense of disloyalty. One's first friend holds a place in one's memory that time cannot efface. I feel sorry and bewildered and very regretful, but, all the same, I know we can never stand to one another for the best things of personal regard. I have learnt to criticise; and she has learnt to—pretend.

I had read it in a hundred forms of speech and action, and trivial devices. I could never feel sure that she meant a single thing she said.

So it is I sit to-night and write, as I said, *of* her, instead of

filling sheets with the commonplace happenings of a life in which she was once interested.

Dad had said nothing more about that anonymous letter. I would like to refer to it, but something holds me back. . . . Something? I can't describe it. There is discomfort, and, yes —*fear*. I don't know what I fear, or what I dread of enlightenment. But this I do know, that that *something* warns me we have not yet finished with the tragedy of the Manor Farm. An enemy whose purpose spells intrigue is at work here behind the scenes of our every-day life. Tarquin knows, and now we know, for that letter was a warning. I wonder how many other people have heard rumours, or received similar warnings? I have read back those portions of my journal which dealt with that time, and that accident. I note that in the account of the inquest no doubt arises as to the occurrence being anything but accidental. Yet in two months' time someone is questioning the verdict.

I know Tarquin is not so popular as one of his position and importance might hope to be. He frankly confessed that there were few people in the neighbourhood who possessed any interest for him. He worked harder and he made his men work harder than any of our limited community. But the reason was obvious to anyone who noted his fine pasturage, and springing acres of grain; who saw dairy-keeping and sheep-rearing assume proportions that spelt large enterprise. Here was ambition working for a purpose, and visioning future years of success. It appealed to me as anything strong and purposeful always had appealed.

I could not bear slackness in either man or woman. To *do* something, to achieve something, to leave the world enriched by some thought, or deed, or work, that seemed to me the real purpose of life.

I knew it was not everyone's ideal. For most people Life was expected to hand out benefits, and blamed for injustice when it failed to do so. To many it was merely a playground for emotions or excitements. To others a vast jig-saw puzzle, the pieces scattered in uncared-for confusion, pieced or placed by Chance. And yet in all these definitions some truth lay hidden. A vague consciousness of Future purpose . . . But how blindly we groped along. How little we *dared* in comparison with what we desired!

In some mood of self-confidence I had looked forward to a fuller and more satisfying existence. I, too, had my dreams

and they visioned the companionship of which most women dream. But of Love—in the sense that Kit and Tony and the gay youth of their respective sets esteemed it—I had no thought. Never had a passing flirtation breathed for me its false illusions. Never had compliment or flattery sounded in my ears as aught but the idle senselessness of an idle moment. And never—I can say it truthfully to these silent pages—had any man stood out as apart from other men by right of personal consciousness. Never—until these last confused weeks.

They had certainly aroused me to a new knowledge of myself. An uncomfortable recognition of interests hitherto unknown warring with reactionary sentiments.

I was in the position of a spectator witnessing the action of a play. Angered with it. Conscious where it failed. More conscious even of something missing in the quality of the actors. And yet through the pretences and unrealities I seemed to hear a call. An entreaty not to judge of effects hampered by liabilities of which I was ignorant. A plea for—what? Time? A second hearing? Later judgment? It may be. I only know that the impersonal has changed into the actual. That—for the first time in my life—a name and the owner of that name stand out as of deeper interest than any other.

How or why this should be I cannot determine.

I am conscious of restlessness; of disquietude. The days seem long as once were weeks. I think, and *think*, until thought is an intrusion instead of an incident. I go over scenes, words, meetings. I talk to Boris and whisper a name in undertones to see his ears prick and his eyes soften. I start at the chance "toot" of a bicycle, or the sound of a step at the back entrance. I find myself watching the workmen with fresh attention in scant hopes of a directing voice that will suddenly sound and direct them. I wonder if an invitation for three-handed bridge would bring him round some leisured evening. I wonder if the memory of Kit's fascinations will prove a lasting memory, or only signify the careless passage of a few idle hours. I wonder—

Oh! if this goes on I shall wonder myself into a state of imbecility! I will write no more until I have really something to write about!

I have kept my word for a month!

Perhaps I should not have done so but for incessant work and a great deal of anxiety.

I see no use in inscribing too many technical details of all that

constitutes poultry-farming. I only know that the "chick" season is one of great trouble. And it all came with a rush. Brood after brood; incessant arrivals. Some were healthy and some were not; and some were killed by a careless mother, or got drowned in the shallow drinking basins, or were preyed on by stray cats, or did any of the hundred and one foolish things that young and ignorant life does for seeming joy of its own risks.

Tony came up two or three times to survey our new stock, and complimented me on my energy. He wanted me to ride à la pillion on the motor bike, but that I frankly declined. He said he was grinding away for his forthcoming trial, but knew he hadn't the ghost of a chance for even a "pass." He seemed to have picked up a lot of new phrases and queer catch-words. He told Dad that University life as at present understood was reducing idleness to a fine art, and that Schools were the only "crab" to a nominally pleasant existence.

He and his chosen pals at Merton had held a debate in the C.R. (whatever that was), and voted entirely against the uses of a University for educational purposes! They had decreed that the talented youth who came as freshman from a public school had already received as much *education* as was good for any human being. Now was his opportunity to forget and relax. Those who really took College life seriously invariably came to a bad end!

I told him that *he* ought to be safe under such conditions. He said perhaps I was right.

Then we started off to explore the addition to our acres, and the neat row of hen-houses awaiting occupants.

"They'll be all ready for the chicks when they're grown up," I said. "I expect quite a hundred, bar accidents."

The fact of being on the Malone's property led to mention of them. I had heard nothing of their arrival in Ireland, but the disturbed state of that country was accountable for anything.

Tony mentioned Kit as an occasional postcard correspondent. She had been paying country-house visits, and had received quite half a dozen proposals.

"Do you think," I asked, "that she will ever care for a man sufficiently to marry him?"

Tony, with one of his idiotic grins, "hoped so," for he was on the waiting list and had adored her from the days of Eton jackets.

Then he said something that startled me. "Wonder if old

Torks has got over it? I'm afraid he's one of those that will go 'off the deep end' when he does go off. I'm glad for his sake that she'll stay at the Mitre for Eights' Week. I'll try and keep her out of harm's way. He's not likely to partake of any of our hectic gaieties. I think he would rather despise them. I was wondering about you, Cobbles?"

(I must explain derivations. "Sherry," "Sherry Cobbler," "Cobbles.")

"About me?" I said.

"Couldn't you put in a few days with us? My respected mother and aunt and Kit. Of course, I could call for you and run you over every day, but—"

"I shouldn't dream of your wasting so much time!" I said, "I only want to see the show once. I'll go over for the Final day."

"You must come to our old barge," he said genially. "Our fellows are going to do great things. Wish I was in it, but those confounded 'grinds' interfere damnably with sports, and I haven't trained sufficiently . . . I say, old thing, this *is* an improvement. From here it looks quite a tidy bit of property. Next year we'll throw out a wing to the home-mansion, and put in a bathroom, what? Then you'll be as snug as bees in clover!"

I ignored botanical ignorance. Merely said I was longing for the trees to be out. "They'll make such a difference," I added.

"Well, the hedges are doing a little shoot," he said; "and the almond tree is beginning to flourish, and the grasshopper complains of the 'white man's burden,' though desire isn't failing yet! Good old Solomon's not prophetically correct. Of course, though, he'd never been to Oxford."

"Oh, Tony!" I cried helplessly. "Will you ever be sensible?"

"I will. I am. I came here strictly on business, so you do well to check a symptom of frivolity. In the first place, who is the purchasee of this addition to the acres of Gayle, Garth and Co.? Have deeds been drawn up, stamped, and witnessed *this* time? I only ask because I must inform my guardian that the estate is now enlarged and under cultivation. He talks of coming over to inspect."

"Who. . . Lord Pennington?"

"The same. A tiresome, long-winded old bore. But that comes of having a giddy mother. My father thought it best to safeguard my future. Perhaps he was right. Anyhow—Oh! but you haven't answered my question—"

"Tarquin arranged the matter with Dad," I said. "I think gradual payments until the sum is paid off. A very easy method."

"Any interest?"

"Not that I heard of."

"Oh, well, that simplifies matters. Of course, I go halves—"

"Tony!"

"Halves, partner, halves . . . (where did I hear that? Sounds familiar?")

"Hawtrey," I said. "*The Message from Mars*, wasn't it?"

"Right. Up to top class. A first for Miss Cobblestones."

"I wonder when you'll finish twisting my unfortunate name into new meanings?"

"Speaks well for the name that it's capable of expressing so much. Few of them do. Mine for instance. No one thinks of varying that. My dearest chum and my fiercest enemy alike address me as Tony. One brave youth did adventure 'Tongs,' but he was ill-advised. He forgot associations of Hammer. I had to remind him."

I hinted that it was feeding time for chicks. So we returned to my side of the enclosure. Tony retired to the parlour for a business talk with Dad.

When I joined them he insisted on my accompanying him to the horticulturist's emporium: gave lavish orders for manuring and turfing and planting the new ground. He impressed speed on an astonished dignitary who called himself a landscape gardener.

"The landscape's all right, my friend; what there is of it. But we want the garden—in double-quick time. Send a man at once. Two or three men. The lady will explain flower beds and enclosures. But as part-proprietor of the estate I shall expect to see it blossoming and colourful when I next come round!"

"When will that be, my lord?" said the amazed professional. "I only arsk, as a matter of curiosity. Gardens don't be springin' up like a bloomin' Aladdin's pallus all in a night."

"Is that so?" grinned Tony, with sincere interest. "What about all this? Couldn't you send us out a few loads of flowers and shrubs, just to make the place look lively, you know?"

The man said he could, of course. He could empty the contents of his hothouses into our garden beds, but unless the gentleman could guarantee the right amount of sunshine, and the absence of frosts at night, there would be little use in doing so.

Turfing and planting he would set about at once. It chanced that there was a really decent bit of soil to encourage culture. So all being satisfactorily arranged the youth waved a gallant farewell, and offered to bet me he'd be in Oxford in twenty-five minutes.

"Must lunch in hall, and I've a lecture afterwards, but I'll be round again in a week or so. Fare thee well, Geni of the Spade, and see that my commands are carried out to the best of thy ability!"

He was off, and as I stood laughing and waving farewells, Tarquin appeared, coming up the road towards him. Both stopped their machines, and began to talk. I could not hear what they said. I only wondered if Tarquin—

He joined me before I reached the bungalow.

"I was coming to say good-bye. . . I have to go up to London. It's—important. I wanted to ask your father if he would give an eye to the men here and see they carry on the work. They're apt to slack if they think no one is after them."

"Won't you come in?" I said. "Dad is in the parlour. Perhaps it would be best to speak to him?"

I hinted at lunch, but he refused. He seemed preoccupied, worried. I wondered what was the matter. Had anything more transpired about those anonymous letters?

Next Day.

Not for some time afterwards did I get any information. Then Dad said that the business was with that hateful lawyer, Gideon Jassey. It appeared he had found out that the adjoining land had been made over to us. He was worrying Tarquin as to title deeds and rights of administration, and goodness knows what all of technical difficulties.

But there was something more. Dad looked troubled. He seemed to hesitate as to whether he should tell me. I insisted gently.

"Well, my dear, the lawyer informed him that there were rumours in the neighbourhood concerning his father's mysterious death. *Mysterious*, mind you. He would like to go into the matter thoroughly."

I interrupted to ask whether he had mentioned anonymous letters? I saw Dad's face whiten suddenly. He took a scrap of paper from his pocket. "Read that . . . I copied it. Tarquin showed me the original."

I read—

" Who was the person to benefit by death of old Marsyas of Manor Farm? . . . And was that death accidental?"

I felt my hand tremble. I threw down the scrap of paper. There was something sinister, threatening, in the words . . . in the atmosphere of the room. I looked at father. As our eyes met it seemed to me that the peace so lately gained was rudely shattered.

Something was at work. Someone was determined to trouble the tranquil waters on which our little boat of enterprise had been so hopefully launched.

I sat down abruptly. My knees were shaking.

" So *that* is why he has gone to London? "

" It means trouble," said my father. " I have suspected something for a long time. I mean that there is an undercurrent of spite working against our friend. You see he made an enemy of that lawyer to begin with. He took business away from him. He brushed aside legal technicalities in somewhat high-handed fashion. Now, law is a bad thing to come up against. You never know what it will land you into. ' Agree with thine adversary quickly whilst thou art in the way with him,' was sound advice, even in ante-Christian times. Tarquin was obstinate. He, what I call, rushed the fences. Now he has to account for his rashness. The position is this—he did not shrink from discussing it. Our friend supposed himself in his rights. There was no question of anyone opposing him. He had all papers and documents necessary to prove his claim, and he proved it. But lately, there has been someone at work to show hurry or carelessness in that enquiry as to old Marsyas' death. Letters don't get written or posted on their own initiative. A new factor in the contribution to suspicion is the eviction of the Malones. Although we benefit by it, I cannot help seeing it is playing into the enemy's hands. That boy—you know I never liked him? "

" No, more did I. He was just a disagreeable necessity."

" I think sometimes he is at the bottom of all this mischief."

" Pat! " I exclaimed. " That half-witted idiot? "

" Half-witted idiots are sometimes very cunning. Suppose —mind I only say—suppose, that he had seen the old man fall, and then given him a blow which rendered him unconscious? The snow had begun to fall. He trusted to that and in a way it appeared credible—as accident."

I was silent for a moment. A new light was breaking down those mists of confusion which had shrouded the mystery of the Manor Farm.

With sudden desperation I plunged into words. I asked if all this meant suspicion of foul play? That the old man's death was not—accidental?

"*I think it is someone's purpose to prove it a murder,*" said father.

I felt the room spin round me in a giddy sickening whirl. *Murder!* And here, in our quiet retreat? . . . amidst this little community of industry. I tried to disbelieve; I tried to rebel. But my will seemed a feeble defence against the horrors of probability.

And something tore at my heart and hurt me more than anything in my life had ever hurt. The fear of what such scandalous rumours would bring at their heels; curs to snap and growl, and dig up bones long hidden in a dust-heap of seeming indifference.

Had people really *not* believed in accident? Had those letters been the slow product of accumulating proof? Was it to someone's advantage to show up the owner of the Manor Farm as in too great haste to seize his heritage?

Was that unpleasant story to be raked out of the ashes of the past and given new light and new publicity?

I am not sure if I faltered these questions, or only thought them. I am not sure of anything about that dreadful night except that I am trying to picture its dreadfulness and in some nightmare of horror I find myself repeating that word—*MURDER.*

PART III

I

April Days.

SPRING at last!

Spring, that I had hoped for and looked forward to. Spring, that was to bring prosperity and good fortune with its sunny days and soft skies. But it had brought also a strange uneasiness of spirit. Gloom. Disquiet. A threat of coming trouble.

Disjointed fragments are entered as record of that time. I was too busily occupied to write at length. But leisure has come, and with it the desire to continue what once promised to be a "story." Springing suddenly from an impulse to which my lonely life gave importance, I started this diary. Up to that last entry, which broke rudely against all rules of the ordinary, the story had flowed casually along. A mere shallow stream, as so many lives look to the casual observer. A sketch of happy-go-lucky folk and incidents and then—suddenly a check.

Drama confronted me. No longer could I rattle along with the trivialities of my feathered comedy; no longer picture for myself the contrast between the casual student's life and that desperate earnestness which meant a man's relentless purpose.

Fate had thrown that contrast at my feet as if to question notice or result. Boy and man. Laughing youth and stern manhood. They had formed a gradual interest scarcely noted, until the whisper of tragedy arose.

From that moment I think something of my own youth fell from me. Its enthusiasms, and its belief in straightforward motives for everyday life. I had pictured a country idyl. Primitive, harmless folk; patriarchal age with flocks and herds, and younger branches of the tribe carrying on the industry of land in all its varied meanings. Instead I found ugly passions. Jealousy. Covetousness. Greed. Envy. A horrible list. Quite unsuited, one would think, to a district of wheat crops and poultry farms; of primitive dwellings; of

life self-centred and self-organised. Necessarily occupied; and necessarily helpful.

Surely no place here for scandals, cruel and full of harm! Yet with disconcerting abruptness they were upon us. A pack unleashed; full-throated with cries of direful meaning.

And ever and through them all I seemed to hear that word my father's lips had let fall. Only a word. But the *meaning* that lies in a fragment of speech carries further than its utterance.

So it is that I hail Spring with a heavy heart. A perpetual dread of the clouds so heavily gathering over the Manor Farm. Its owner is shunned and disliked. Rumour scotched in one place rises in another.

Our three-mile-distant vicar has actually called at last. Called to question Dad as to the authority of rumours and their origin.

The doctor, who is also the coroner of the district, was a personal friend of the Rev. Cyril Thorncliffe. He was naturally indignant at any criticism of his methods. These scandals had been discussed with the vicar, and in spite of long neglect the reverend gentleman came to enquire as to what member of his neglected flock might be culpable!

Why he selected Dad as exponent of culpability I cannot imagine; unless, perhaps, our bungalow had an air of greater importance than most of its neighbours.

I was present at the interview and took an instant dislike to the pompous, self-opinionated individual. When he spoke of the neglect of this district and its slackness in the way of attending "early celebration," or even Sunday afternoon services, I answered for ourselves that Sunday had its occupations as well as week-days. Dad remarked casually that we had been here for six months and our absence from church services had not seemed to have come under clerical notice till now. The vicar looked uncomfortable; spoke of bad weather; distance; a tendency to bronchitis. Dad said these excuses met his own views exactly.

"But your daughter? . . . Young ladies can always do so much to assist us. The choir, the Sunday school, flowers for the altar. You have quite a wonderful show of flowers here."

We had. Our new plots were golden and gay with masses of wallflower and tulips. Daffodils nodded to the breeze. Great clumps of white and purple arbresias bordered the paths.

I told him I preferred to see flowers blooming in the open air rather than wasting bloom and sweetness in the close atmosphere of a church. He looked horrified.

"Wasting! My *deah* young lady? In God's service? On His altar? Surely that means an honour both to presenter and presented?"

I answered that opinions differed. Either one loved flowers, in which case one wished to see them enjoy their natural existence; or one did *not*, in which case it was as well to purchase them for indoor decoration; not to rob one's garden.

He intoned something about "the fruits of the garden being the gift of God," and Dad said in that case the Deity could view his gifts to greater advantage in their natural setting. His reverence flushed angrily; wondered whether by chance he had come up against Nonconformity? That might account for indifference to the privileges of his own preaching and teaching, apart from the delectability of "services" reverent and manifold.

He rose to take leave, formulating his *real* motive as climax of his visit. "I suppose . . . ah—Mr. Gayle, you are not acquainted with this so-called atheist, who has made himself notorious in the neighbourhood?"

Dad's eyebrows questioned the description.

"Atheist? Shirley, my dear, of whom can Mr. Thorncliffe be speaking?"

I shook my head, apparently puzzled. His reverence waxed impatient. He left no doubt as to whom he meant, and said some very harsh and very strange things. Dad listened patiently. I—in a silent fury of indignation.

When the unmelodious clerical voice ceased, Dad simply suggested that the only way to silence gossip was to turn a deaf ear to it or—go straight to the fountain head and have it out. Mr. Thorncliffe asked if that was a suggestion to call on the owner of the Manor Farm? Dad replied that the neglect of some four or five years might render that visit less welcome than orthodox.

"Mr. Tarquin Marsyas is a particular friend of mine," he added. "And I can only say that to call on him in the same spirit of enquiry as you have called on me might place you in a very awkward position. If this village is part of your parish and we are to consider ourselves your parishioners we are certainly entitled to complain of neglect on your part.

It would seem that only the unpleasantness of notoriety has a claim on clerical memory."

At that his reverence grew crimson; stuttered, mumbled incoherent phrases, and took his departure.

Dad rubbed his hands in glee, but I was too heavy-hearted to smile. This horrible tale was like one of those worms your spade cuts in two, but that still persists in rejoining itself. Again it united; again it grew to slimy length of living signification. No one knew what it meant, save as a suspicion of that past tragedy. But no one seemed fair-minded enough to speak out denial, or champion the unfortunate cause of the scandal.

The more acres that Tarquin bought, the more he worked and improved his land, the more reckless grew the hints of how and why he prospered. The extraordinary coincidence of that death to which he owed his present prosperity.

Letters still were penned. Hints became more venomous. Dad was frankly uncomfortable. He said the matter was assuming proportions that might awaken enquiry from legal authorities. In his own mind he was perfectly certain that the lawyer, Jassey, was at the bottom of it all. Tarquin had told us he had consulted his own solicitor, a young, brisk and intelligent man, who had served in the War and studied human nature on a larger scale than Courts and Chambers. He had said nothing could be done until the writer of the letters was discovered. He suggested employing a detective but that Tarquin would not do.

I think he had made up his mind to ignore or live it down. He had few friends here amongst the rough populace or grumbling villagers in the neighbourhood. He had engaged more labour and more machinery than any of the other farmers because he was in haste to see his numerous acres pass from the transition state of digging and ploughing to that of produce and prosperity. But the fact of being able to employ workmen only seemed to add to his unpopularity.

So matters stand when I once more resume this scribbling habit of mine, and amidst the waking energies of nature ask myself, "What will this new year mean to *me*?"

For to me it is April and not January that deserves to be called the New Year. April with its gifts of sun and shower and springing grasses. Its song of hope and its smile of promise.

Life is renewing itself. Weaving fresh enchantments. Whispering secrets to tree and flower amidst deep-rooted

solitudes, and rioting with sex-persistence in every call of beast or bird. Animal life; natural life. But life everywhere in beautiful and terrifying mystery!

I watch my young flock grow to semi-maturity while tending that larger flock of my feathered kingdom. I run races with Boris in the abandon of some gay spring morning when the air is a thrill, and the scents of dew-drenched grass and flower a rebuke to tardy wakefulness. If I have loved the springtime in towns when its slow achievements scarcely mark a progress, I needs must love it doubly here in wide and spacious solitudes.

Despite mishaps and hazards my birds thrive and increase. Under Gander's supervision many vicissitudes of poultry-life have been obviated. He has found the right food, the right housing. They look healthy and give little trouble. He tells me what to sell for market, or what to keep as breeders and layers. And triumphantly he points to my neat rows of houses, and the general cleanliness and tidiness of the ground.

"Not a place here around to touch it!" he says proudly. And then we go into the question of next year, and incubators and foster-mothers and I agree to experiment when funds sanction the venture.

Tony had gone to London for the Easter vacation. He stayed with his mother and had been interviewed by his guardian as to the uses of a university. He wrote me a very funny letter, and mentioned Kit as being in "unusually good form."

He also said that they were having a house-party at his mother's place, Colne Hall, near Hertford.

"Kit and I are giving it all on our own," he wrote. *"It's the Day of the Young, and, by Jove, they mean to show the old 'uns how to live! Wish you'd 'join the dance.' Wake you up a bit. There's a lovely American girl. She's a scream! Came over with fifteen cabin trunks and wears four different dresses a day. She worships Kit. Seems to think she's just the right produce of her race, and her century. And she knows how to brew seven different kinds of cocktails!. . . Priceless. You'd squirm. But then you're a different type. Kit's asked Torks to join us. You and he might make the trip together. Time you had a bit of a holiday. The menagerie opens daily, seven to twelve."*

I have entered the letter in his own words. In all aspects of life Tony was consistently—Tony.

I found myself debating—" to go or not to go ? " A mor violent contrast to my present life than a fashionable house party I could not imagine. It seemed ages since I had been t anything of the sort ; since I had seen London in its ne post-war aspect, or met and talked with people whose socia position condoned the extravagances of life. The hardships c war years were forgotten, or pushed aside as unwelcom intruders. The dead were but names in some scarred heart the sacrifices—unremembered—save in sudden shock of un veiling war memorials.

I felt I had no place in Kit's house-party. She merely aske me as a return for her own visit. All the same, I wondere whether Tarquin would go ? If he did I felt little inclination t play spectator to the " cat and mouse " proceedings of m erratic friend. There was no promise of enjoyment in th matter. Only a curiosity so intense it was almost painful.

Words she had spoken, tormenting hints, came back to m and made me wonder whether she had heard any more of thi local scandal. Tony knew, and he might have spoken—bu no doubt it would be an added incentive to gaiety to show off guest around whom mystery hovered—whom rumour ha marked as prey for her own scandalous purpose.

I took counsel with father. He was of opinion I ought to go It would do me good. Shake me out of my groove ; rouse m to the importance of that new order of things, building itself o the ruins of the past. Establishing forms of precedence hithert unknown. Throning on high the Profiteer and the would-b Socialist, and forgetting with parliamentary aptitude a promises of Parliamentary Coalition !

(I am quoting him ; fresh from *The Times*' leading article and the snapshots of the Penny Press !)

" What about dress ? " I said, after patient attention. " I means money, and it seems so useless. I mean—after a week- the clothes I should need for Colne Hall would be useless here.

He regarded me gravely. " I can understand that."

" And you," I went on ; " what about you ? A week wit no one to cook and get meals, and wash up, and air your clothes Dad, I don't believe a *man* ever knows what running a hous entails. It's an endless series of endless jobs from mornin till night ! "

" Then you'd rather not go ? "

" You mean I'd better stay here ? "

We both laughed. We quite understood each other.

"A couple of dresses . . . I could spare ten pounds. You could get them in Oxford? Ellison s?"

"Of course, if I meant to go—but I'm doubtful."

He glanced at Tony's letter again. "Well, let me know when you've made up your mind."

I said I would and went off for a run on my bicycle through all the dawning glory of the springtime. On my return I met Tarquin, also bicycling. I brought him back to tea. I wanted to know whether he had received his invitation from Kit.

He seemed preoccupied. He told us of the vicar's visit and that he had received the reverend gentleman in the home-paddock while he was inspecting a young horse for breaking in.

"I thought him very offensive," he added. "If he thinks it his duty to listen to the scandals of Clanditch he'll have enough to do!"

Dad related his experience, while I poured out tea for them both—and wondered when I could put in my question as to the Hertford visit.

Same Night.

I have never had a conversation with Tarquin that was at once so interesting and so difficult to subscribe *as* conversation.

We had walked to and fro the new piece of ground, turfed and neat and flower-bordered. (The horticulturist had planted it out for me with hardy and useful contributions.) He asked me if I approved of it all and when I said, "Of course"—stopped, and looked at me.

The fine lines of his face and the thick rippled hair struck me afresh with that unlikeness to Saxon types which so well represented his name. And to-day, as often before, I was conscious of strength and firmness of purpose, typical of the man who conquers.

"I want to ask your advice," he said.

My face might well have expressed surprise. This was a reversal of things. It was I who usually came to him with requests.

"Advice?" I echoed feebly.

"It's not about these matters——" he made a gesture conveying the insignificance of our united acres—"It's about . . . about your friend."

"Tony?" I questioned.

"No—not Tony. The other. Lady Kit. Do you know

she has invited me to stay with her people, at their country house?"

I said I did not know the invitation had come, but I was not surprised.

"*Not* surprised? . . . Well, I am. I thought my existence would be forgotten once she returned to her own mode of life. This——" (again he looked round)—"had no real significance. An interlude—a picnic, she called it. I suppose it seemed like that? What surprised me was that she should be a friend of yours, and yet so absolutely different from yourself."

I tried to explain. It meant going back to school days, to war times, to the stress of changed circumstances. He listened with grave attention.

"I don't know what friendship means to a woman—" he said—"as a tie; a link holding life to mutual interests and sympathy? If a man can't feel *that* he doesn't call another man—friend. I felt it once. I shall never feel it again. The war took it out of my life."

I was silent. What could one say that seemed real when one faced the reality of impersonal sorrow. He went on quietly, as if unconscious of my silence.

"My affection for this place is, in a manner, bound up with that friendship. It belonged to his family. It would have come to him but for that cursed shell! . . . He begged me, if I ever got back to England, to come here and see his people. I did so . . . and when they told me they wanted to leave the country and go to Canada I asked my father to buy the farm and let me work it into life and prosperity. . . . If determination can do it, I shall not fail. I know that he—my friend—would have wished this. Often it has seemed as if he came to me in that old solitary house, or walked with me over those fields. I have made no other friend. One does not repeat that experience. Casual likings, chance companionship—yes, but not the other—the *real* thing."

He paused. I heard him sigh. Then he said—

"So—that is all over; and only in work, hard, self-effacing, tiring, can I find forgetfulness. They call me a hard master; a hard man. Perhaps I seem so for fear of what softening would mean. I love the very loneliness that most men shun. I have learnt to value it for that quiet comforting which ancient things bring. Memories. Traditions. Wrongs outlived and mistakes forgotten. Often in the long dark evenings

I have felt conscious of other presences. Of company; of help. Of encouragement to do for the dead what they had left undone for their successors. I daresay it sounds foolish to you . . . but that is what my life here meant and—means. Do you think I should be acting unwisely to allow another interest to interfere with it?"

My thoughts flew to Kit; to that restless, bewildering fortnight. I told him I could not possibly advise on the point in question. It was a matter purely personal.

"I suppose it is. I suppose you can't imagine what it was like to come out of gloom into the dazzling sunshine of such days and hours as were suddenly offered. But when they were over, I made up my mind to put them aside for ever. Such things were not for me. . . . Yet now—here comes a fresh temptation."

He walked on as if scarce conscious of movement, and I walked beside him for no better reason than that we had been walking together.

"You are so—so restful," he said suddenly. And then stopped and took my hands and looked down at me. "That's why I've always liked you. All the same, I find it in my heart to blame you for presenting so strong a contrast. . . . Why didn't you keep her away?"

I said that was hardly possible. She was my friend of school days and had invited herself. He dropped my hands and stumbled into explanations.

"I hope I'm not making a fool of myself—in your eyes, I mean. I've no use for love and women and that sort of nonsense. She—she was the essence of all that makes sex fascinating. One felt it. One could not help oneself. Moths will adventure the candle-light however sharp the pain of singed wings. But, having assuaged the burns, it would seem foolhardy to dare the flame's attraction again. That is what I wanted to say to you. I suppose *you* are going?"

"To Colne Hall? I have been asked. I haven't decided."

"If—if you went," he said in an odd, suppressed voice; "I should feel safer."

I felt myself laugh foolishly as one picturing man's helplessness at a moment of provocation.

"That is a very extraordinary remark," I said. "Surely you are long past the age of leading strings?"

"In a way, of course. I told you when I came here it was to get away from everyone who could prove a disturbing

influence. I was sick and tired of men—and women. Th sort of women war and foreign countries bring one up against A man does get like that. Fed up with sex indulgence. Hatin himself in that his Maker places him so nearly level with th beasts he affects to despise! But we aren't much better I look back and hate myself. I look forward and—fear. . . It's horrid to come up against a thing unexpectedly. To fin yourself facing the old attraction of self-indulgence. I—forgiv me—I don't know why I'm talking to you like this. I've n right to. I mean, your kind friendship doesn't imply that yo should be bored with stupid confidences."

"I thought you wanted my advice?"

"We began that way, didn't we? Curious how I'v gone off the track."

He drew himself up and squared his shoulders. "Yo haven't given me the advice?"

I said it was a purely personal matter. He must decid for himself.

He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Shirley, hav *you* ever been in love?"

The omission of the usual "Miss" surprised me less tha the impulsive question. I felt my cheeks flame.

"No!" I said fiercely. "I wish—I mean——"

"That it's no business of mine? Please say it. I deserv a rebuke. But I thought romance was more than possible i a life so—so popular—and useful as yours."

"I think I am not of the romantic type," I said curtly "And from what I have seen and heard——"

"But not—experienced?" He slipped the word into m sudden break. "That—believe me, is what makes li interesting. Perhaps dangerous. But why should I speak s blunt a truth? Your friend is far more capable of enlightenin you. Which brings me back to our starting point. Shall w pay that visit to Colne Hall?"

"We?"

"I would not venture alone."

Something strange seemed to happen to me as I heard h words and met his eyes. Something that hurt, and y showed me life as a practical reality; illumined it wit possibilities.

It has been with me ever since. It is keeping pace with m thoughts, and illuminating every dip of my pen. It is th whispering of a hope that finds itself facing joys undreamt o

And also it is the terror of pain close at hand and threatening prolonged suffering.

To keep oneself apart and away from men and their power to hurt, their passions and infidelities, that is what I had determined on long ago as the only safeguard for a tranquillised existence.

I had seen love affairs and love matches innumerable. Had learnt to laugh at the exaggerations of the one and the brief glamour of the other. Apart from romantic instinct, marriage seemed bound to be a failure. Honeymooners were wise when they permitted hotel managers to supply the food and nature the scenic effects of honeymoon passions!

Pitiful indeed the plight of the unwary. The first mistakes of a dinner-table are often the prelude to divorce.

"It never lasts; it can't," I had said to myself again and again.

I wonder if I shall ever say it truthfully—after to-night.

II

May Days.

THERE seems no sort of method in this way of telling a story.

Some day, perhaps, I shall read it to my grandchildren, and let them draw their own conclusions as to what life on a poultry-farm could mean!

As matters stand at present I look with surprise at the pictures I have drawn of a promised comedy. I see where it has forsaken the line of art and diverged into something almost tragic. I say, "Is that the way life treats us? Playing cat-like with trivial incidents and suddenly giving proof of claws, sharp as steel behind their velvet pads?"

Who would have thought six months ago— But no! That has been all written, or memorised. I mustn't go back. It is the present I have to reckon with. The present—that wise folks say is already the future had we but true vision of life's meanings.

I broke off these "entries," or memories, on that night of indecision as to whether I would accept the invitation to Kit's

house-party. A month has passed since then, and as I glance back on weeks and days, as yet unrecorded, I feel doubtful what to describe and what to omit.

Perhaps for the sake of the imaginary child, or grandchild, who shall be regaled with this answer to "Tell me a story" I had better word-paint a twentieth-century house-party in those new years that dawned on us after the Great War. People were just beginning to recover from effects and conveniently forget "causes." The pro-German, like his antecedent the pro-Boer, was busy counting advantages and sounding hypocritical entreaties not to be "too hard on the Hun." Brutalities were hidden under cloak of imperial coercion. Crimes and horrors swept aside by the cedar-mop of conferences. Everything was being reformed and replaced save what was unreformable and unreplaceable. Society—gathering diminished forces and tattered fragments of dignity—was trying to re-establish its importance as part of the British Constitution.

The great houses that had been run as private hospitals and convalescent retreats for officers were once more swept and garnished, and fitted and re-servanted as far as possible. People gave and accepted invitations with strict informality. The old excesses and exaggerations were proclaimed bad form as yet. Homely dishes, and indifferent service, apologised for "the difference the war has made." But youth had asserted its claims as paramount to any memory or any restrictions, and for sake of youth and its fateful sacrifices the wildest crazes were forgiven.

"Boy and girl" were terms of wide meaning; stretching to juvenile matrons of forty and gay old bachelors of three-score and two! (The *two* was insisted on as sounding more juvenile than the Psalmist's figuration!)

Thus, when I found myself at Colne Hall I found also a startling number of contrasts. It was all very bewildering. Kit's welcome was enthusiastic. She seemed genuinely glad to see me, but from the first I knew my place was the background. My position in this *galère*, that of onlooker, not participant. I had few accomplishments. I could not "jazz" and would not learn, and no one waltzed now. Foxtrots; one-steps; contortions and vagaries—these were the significations of modern dances! I must confess to a plea of "do leave me out of it."

Tony did his best to persuade, but I was immovable; so after a time they left me "out of it."

I watched with some amazement the exploits of Miss Eulalie van Holberg, the American heiress described by Tony as an expert in cocktail mixery. That was only one of her many accomplishments. She could dance divinely, play tennis, ride any sort of horse, drive a car, and in and through all manage to be exquisitely dressed and in unfailing high spirits. I give up the task of attempting further description. She and Kit were mutual incentives to any mad schemes.

I had other companions. Kit's gentle, placid mother and Tony's aunt and his grumpy but interesting guardian (who would insist on talking "poultry-yard possibilities" with me). And there were two or three Oxford 'graduates in second years of importance, and a couple of new M.P.'s, very full of themselves and what they intended to do in matters of reconstruction. Also—— There I break off. It is hard to be frankly truthful, even to oneself, when truth is capable of compromise. I meant to write of an interest far exceeding those mentioned. But it is perplexing and difficult.

I may try to paint Tarquin Marsyas in surroundings unlike any that have hitherto placed him as picturable, but I feel I shall face failure. He is, in some ways, as elusive as Kit herself. I had watched him with her; with other girls; with men old and young; watched him talking, dancing (he could even "jazz"), card-playing. Save that he looked foreign (some said "classic") there seemed little difference between him and the other men. He did the same things, and seemed to enjoy doing them. He helped at *tableaux* and amateur theatricals, or foolish "nursery" games. Again he would talk politics, or farming, with the elder men, and be tenderly courteous to the dowagers. If he had aimed at popularity he had certainly hit the mark. Tony played a sort of admiring aide-de-camp.

It was a week of kaleidoscopic changes; exotic frivolities. An odd mixture of day and night revels. Looking back on it now, I am reminded of Cinderella and her ball. Only for *this* Cinderella there was no prince and no lost slipper. In chance excitements or watchful interests I passed from scene to scene. I looked at people wonderingly; so near to tragic memories, so bent on forgetting there had ever been tragedy. Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy! That was the cry. Given with fierce energy. A greedy desire to seize each moment and make it yield the uttermost meaning of pleasure.

And amidst all the recklessness moved that Queen of Irresponsibility—Kit. Adored, acclaimed, pursued. The centre

of admiration as of applause. For she was inventive and untiring. To me an incessant wonder. I wished I could have known what she meant to Tarquin. There was nothing in his manner to betray special interest. He never singled her out or paid her the exaggerated homage of her court of followers. But he gave me the impression of an acute consciousness of her. He knew when she entered or left a room. When she wanted him for a partner or needed his help in any special novelty improvised as amusement. He would be talking to me and I would notice a sudden pause, an odd distraction. Then I knew she was somewhere near. Subtly attracting or claiming a chance glance; a careless, "You—missing four, Signor Superbus!"

That meant a dance engagement in programme-less days. You carried your turn in your memory, or lost it. And she had so many names for him, and he seemed indifferent as to what he was designated. Bewildering, was it not? And those rival claims. Men, young, wealthy, well-born. Heirs by means of strange and sudden tragedies. Advanced to importance and avid to seize its every meaning. Baronetcies, earldoms, dukedoms. All for the young. All for the new aristocracy rising from the ashes of dead descent. Plundered from hazards of battlefield. Won at the sword point. But all glorifying that new wonder of youth, even as I had seen it glorified by its own supremacy in the grim old University town.

And so it went on, this week of vivid days and heedless nights. Then came one night—the last.

I hadn't meant to write of it. I shrink from the pain and the shame and the self-betrayal it means and yet—it seems to have a place in this confession.

There had been a dance. Impromptu; got up when a contingent from neighbouring houses dropped in for tennis and stayed on for dinner, as they often did.

Kit kept one or two "tame musicians," as she called them on the premises. One, a delicate Italian boy who played the violin exquisitely. Another, of un-named nationality, could do anything and everything with the piano. These two, aided by a footman who extemporised on the dinner-gong, and a page boy who did great execution with shovel and tongs, made up a jazz band of alarming quality. When the strum of rag-time was at its worst I crept away. The great hall where they danced opened into a small study that no one ever used. It had been a steward's room in the days of Lord St. Aubyn

where he had investigated accounts and received advice from his butler as to replenishing the wine cellar.

It contained merely a writing table, a couch and a couple of chairs; also a book-case filled with books on stud farms and agriculture. The window was long and opened out on a tiny balcony overlooking the west side of the grounds. A shaded lamp stood on a pedestal in one corner. It gave a dim light which effectively shrouded an impression of shabbiness; of worn leather and faded curtains.

I went to the window and opened it. The cool air was fragrant with garden scents; a sky powdered with stars made me think of it as embracing Silverhatch; looking down on the little bungalow, the sheltering hen-houses, the watchful promenades of Boris. And Dad—alone in his parlour-study, busy over books and papers or indulging in sly naps. (I had arranged for a woman friend of Gander's to come in every day and clean up, and do some plain cooking.) So far all had gone well, and to-morrow I was to return.

I wondered whether Tarquin was leaving by the same train. In any case, Tony was going back to Oxford and would be my companion. I stepped out on the balcony. One of the heavy curtains fell behind me, partially closing the window. The clash and frenzy of infuriated "rag-time" was deadened by distance. I stood leaning over the low stone parapet, thinking of the coming change.

I was glad I had come here, though I could not call my visit enjoyable. Still, as one interested in life and its many phases, I felt it was better to have seen things as they were in these transition days than to read second-hand descriptions in hectic bursts of journalism. But I had had enough. I longed to return to busy hours and days that left me too tired to think.

Here I had too much leisure, saw too many startling contrasts. One among them too vividly present for my own peace of mind. I thought of quiet talks. Of *one* confidence that had seemed to invite me into a sanctuary of inner meanings . . . that had left me wondering, and speculating.

I was as far now as then from actual knowledge of what it meant. Of the real nature of an attraction that had left me spectator; all disapproval of what spelt folly in every sense of the word.

"If he cares—really," I thought, and then the thought broke off sharply to a sound of low laughter; the closing of a door; voices.

Sharply I turned. The long curtain hid the room and all but a faint streak of light. Through the nearly closed window I heard Kit's voice.

"Now, sit down and let's have that deferred talk. . . You won't mind if I smoke?"

"Need you ask if I mind anything you do, so long as it is *you* who do it?"

Tarquin's voice. I grasped the cold stone edge of the balcony and told myself I must go away; I mustn't listen. But my limbs seemed leaden-weighted.

"That's the first polite thing you've said for days. You disapprove of me very thoroughly. I wanted to know. . . That's why I asked you here."

"To see you in your proper setting? Apart from everything that is simple and natural?"

"You get enough of that from our dear Martha, surely! As for 'natural,' well, this is my *milieu*. I am as much myself here as I can ever hope to be."

There was a moment's silence.

Then he said, "I am still wondering why I was selected for the experiment?"

"Haven't you enjoyed it?"

"No—if I must be truthful."

"Yes, do. It's so refreshing. To think I should have danced with you, eaten and drunk with you, piped to you, quarrelled with you, and after seven days you say you haven't enjoyed it! What is the accusation?"

"None. Only I was wondering what satisfaction a woman feels from consciousness of torturing a man?"

"Any woman? . . . or any man?"

"You—" he said hoarsely, "and myself."

"My dear Signor Tarquinius!"

"Ah *don't!*" His voice seemed to break through an enforced restraint. "You've mocked at me, played with me long enough. What else could I expect? I courted unhappiness when I accepted your invitation. To you I must seem only a clod—a fool. An actor playing the part given to him——"

"You played it very well, if there has been no rehearsal."

"What do you mean?"

I heard her voice, satiric, taunting; saying things a woman has no right to say. Words that sting like nettles and defy direct answer. Soon they were quarrelling. Quarrelling

fiercely, rudely. The "buttons off the foils," as Kit said, describing it to me afterwards.

I could not tell whether he loved or loathed her, catching but hints of impassioned words; the echo of crude anger. I longed to get away. I tried to cover my ears but then told myself if I was discovered *that* plea would convince no one. As it happened, their anger and mutual accusations deadened other senses of perception. They rose. Kit striving for dignity, Tarquin only all irritated, disgusted manhood. Knowing full well he was proved and wanting as humbled courtier in her train. Conscious, perhaps, that he was making a strange return for hospitality.

The scene closed. In crude surroundings; scent of cigarette smoke, sweetness of her own perfumed, haunting self. Defiance challenged defiance. The strangled music of the band played their march of retreat.

I heard the door open. A frenzy of chords, feet, voices. Then a call—

"Missing five . . . .This is ours, Kit. Where on earth have you been?"

The door shut violently. I found myself cold and sick and trembling in a conscience-stricken mood that accused and left me defenceless. And then, in some vague fashion, I crept away and got out of the crowd and went upstairs to my own room.

Later, Kit came to me.

"I saw you . . . on the balcony. Was the window open? If so, I hope you were edified?"

I tried to explain. She cut my words short.

"My dear, do you think I care who heard, or didn't hear! I always thought he was a cave man. You see he is; at least, you *heard*. No one ever spoke to me like that before. I don't know how he dared!"

To and fro she paced the room. Pouring out wrathful sentences. In a frenzy with herself, with him, with me in that I would not take part on either side.

Exhausted, passion-pale, she flung herself into a chair.

"Why don't you say I've met my match; that it serves me right? Why do you keep so calm and so . . . so superior?"

The next moment she laughed, saying she hadn't told me half, or had I been clever enough to gather that he had contemplated marrying her? *Marrying?* . . .

"Can you beat it? as Eulie says. I—a farmer's wife! I'd have forgiven him more easily if he had suggested . . . the other thing. An idyl. An episode. . . . But not that coarse, self-destructive remedy of an ill-balanced passion—marriage! *Nom de Dieu!* with a hundred unforgettable sins to its name! The most irrational, tactless form of legalised misery man has ever invented. You give him the right to be brutal; to insult you as he would never have dared to insult but for excuse of ownership! Then you smile scorn at unlicensed virgins withering in senile discontent. It is they who should pity you if they only knew what they had escaped!"

Thus she raved and I listened, perforce; sorry for friendship's sake and bitterly ashamed for her own.

"You shouldn't have asked him," I repeated. "He's not the sort of man you can play fast and loose with."

She grew suddenly quiet. She sat up, pushed back her disordered hair, and looked at me.

"He said he could *kill* me! That he had killed someone . . . for a lesser insult. What did he mean? The world reeks of horrors. The papers are full of them. Human life seems to possess no sacredness now. The war unchained man's lust for killing. . . . It hasn't reckoned with the beast it let loose . . . and your Tarquin is one. . . . I feel as if I hated and feared him, and yet—Oh God, Shirley, I could love him because he understands the wild bad side of me. The side I've never shown you, poor frightened prude that you are!"

And then her arms went up and she threw herself beside me and buried her face in my lap, shaking with hysterical sobs, uttering words I refuse to write, for very shame of hearing them.

(Oh Kit! My Kit! How far away we were then from all that our past friendship had promised!)

And now I am home with this memory and that scene to add to the store of records I have gathered.

I did not see Tarquin before I left. I don't know when he went. Tony took charge of me. A little stupid and heavy-eyed after that frantic night. He seemed more inclined to sleep than to talk and I was glad of it. The cross-country journey was tiresome and long. But, like all things, it came to an end and Oxford greeted us with its invariable tears!

Tony motored me back before returning to College. I had

not thought I should ever be so thankful to see my humble little home as I was that night.

I had much to tell Dad, and much to hear. But on one subject I kept silence. Even now I write of it with reluctance. Yet it had to be written as part of my own experience. A tragic and hateful thing.

Life has taken me unawares. Has forced me to face disconcerting facts with hateful recognition of their existence. Escape is impossible, yet I seek it from sheer dread of prison bars of Fate. I try to believe that scene excusable. I try to shut the ears of memory to shamed confessions. But in my heart I find myself wishing I had never left this safe refuge. Never spent that mad exciting week amidst a crowd classed as "Riddles of Modern Life" in the columns of society papers.

What, indeed, had I—humble Martha of the countryside—to do in that fantastic *galère?*

(I believe I have said that before.)

A touch on my knee; a soft, warm snuffling at my hand. Boris, the faithful and patient, had come in to cheer me. I pushed aside paper and pen, and talked to him of all I had done, or left undone.

God was kind to dogs. He gave them faithful hearts and understanding souls. For surely there may be a soul in an animal as in a human entity. And for comfort and intelligence and patient unswerving faithfulness what shall equal the affection of your dog?

Has not some wise person said that he is the only dumb creature who *can* love his master better than himself? And how he remembers—bless him!

III

Fresh Records.

I WONDERED, naturally, whether Tarquin would come to see me after our return. I had a great deal to do both in the house and out for the first few days. I learnt, too, that there was a new-comer in the district. Dad told me he had seen him, and formed his own opinion.

"He says he has come to study the poultry industry. He has a room and boards with Mrs. Sutton at View Cross, down the road. He is always pottering about. Asking questions, quite irrelevant to what he is supposed to be studying. He was prowling round here one day so I tackled him. I think—Scotland Yard, Sherry."

I stared, wondering. "Scotland Yard? A detective. . . . Oh! Dad, surely not?"

"I may be wrong, of course. But you'll see him, and you can judge for yourself. He was very anxious to know where our friend of the Manor Farm was, and when he would return."

"Is it about those letters, do you think?"

Dad said that might be the reason, only he was at a loss to imagine who had authorised the mission.

"An oily, smooth-spoken rascal. I don't like him," he added.

With awakened curiosity I summoned Boris and took a stroll down our main street.

I passed Mrs. Sutton's bungalow but saw nothing of her lodger. I went on and on, rejoicing in the new wide expanses of green; the flush of almond blossoms; the lovely clusters of wild cherry. The wind had still some hint of sharpness, but the sun had worked its old magic and brought the seeming deadness of winter to life once more.

I was sorry I had not brought my bicycle. It was just the day for a run. The road turned aside amidst high hedges, and skirted wide untilled acres of waste land before leaving me to cross country and so by rights-of-way and stiles and queer dips and hollows to come round to the village again.

Suddenly, as we trod the rough ground leading to our new boundaries, Boris stopped and began to bark violently. Suspecting a rabbit, I did not check him. But so fierce a growl escaped that I stared around to see what was the disturbing object.

In some sort of twisting, slithering fashion a figure crept out of the hedge which here was low and broken. I saw a red-faced man, somewhat shabbily dressed. He carried a stick in his hand and shook it threateningly at Boris.

"Please *don't!*" I exclaimed. "The dog won't touch you. But he's not accustomed to be threatened."

He touched a shabby tweed cap, and regarded me keenly.

"I'll take your word for it, Miss; but I'm none too fond of dawgs. You never know what they'll do."

"This dog won't do anything if you don't molest him," I said. My eyes turned to the hedge. I suggested the path was quite open and preferable.

He muttered something about looking for a certain herb that grew hereabouts. Suspicion flashed to my mind.

The man from Scotland Yard of whom Dad had spoken!

I looked at him attentively. A red mottled face; shifty eyes; stumpy short figure. Not a pleasing person at all, and one whose mission in life was hard to place.

"A *herb*—" I repeated; and then ran glibly over certain names, country names that country folk gave to plants around. He did not seem enlightened. I put him down as no botanist whatever he might pretend. Boris stood at defiance; growling at intervals of the conversation.

Boldly I plunged. "I think you are a stranger? Perhaps you're looking for a poultry-farm? This is a colony of little else."

He said he was thinking of that. Did I recommend the business as a lucrative one? He had been told the risks exceeded the profits. I told him that I had not been here a year as yet, so I didn't feel qualified to answer. I added that it was pronounced a paying industry, once you established your special breed and name in the district.

He suggested that farming perhaps was "a more profitable affair." He had seen some fine pasturage and cattle. The land hereabouts. . . . His eyes wandered vaguely. I made no suggestion. He asked if there wasn't rather a fine sort of farm out Brize way—belonging to a war gent, he'd heard?

I mentioned the Manor Farm—casually.

Of course, he knew it. I could see that. He was putting questions with a special purpose. I let him go on. He spoke of the "fine old place." He'd like to have seen it, but the owner was away.

"Oh no," I said quickly. "He's there now, I'm sure. He was away, but he came back—"

I threw my mind to dates and circumstances, and added—"a week ago."

The man shook his head.

"Then someone's tellin' lies. I was round there only yesterday. Saw his housekeeper. Couldn't get in. Orders to let no one into the place in his absence. . . . Some months, she said, before he'd be back."

Months! No wonder I was incredulous. Was it likely

Tarquin would have returned, set all work going, and then departed for months without a farewell, or an explanation? I couldn't believe it. I said the man must have confused the Manor Farm owner with someone else. He was a personal friend of my father's and my own. We would have been informed if he had had such intention.

At that he seemed to grow more curious. Being friends of the gentleman, we might perhaps give a little information respecting his habits—his popularity. Was he liked? Was it true that he was a hard master? Had he not bought a large quantity of land lately? And so on.

I was on my guard. I gave as little satisfaction as possible. I tried to convey that it was no business of his as to what Mr. Marsyas did, or left undone.

He said that was as might be. "All the same, it was queer he should make a bolt of it just when pressure was being brought upon a certain matter."

Then he slouched off, keeping a wary eye on Boris and flourishing his stick with open defiance.

"A hateful brute!" I thought to myself, and then took to wondering what was the "certain matter?"

I betook myself to the village emporium, ostensibly to buy darning needles, really to seek further information respecting Tarquin.

Casual enquiries soon brought me the answer I sought.

"Mr. Marsyas? . . . Yes, he had come back, and gone again. To London, it was supposed."

Not liking to appear too inquisitive I returned home.

I told Dad what I had heard. He was as surprised as myself. Why had Tarquin gone off so suddenly and without coming to see us? It was unusual. He had always called to say farewell before any previous absence.

He looked at me enquiringly.

"There was no—quarrel, or—or misunderstanding between you, was there? I mean, we have seen nothing of him since he came back from Colne."

I felt my face flame with sudden warmth.

"Of course not! Indeed, I saw very little of him. Kit, or her friend, Miss van Holberg, seemed to engross all his attention."

Dad said vaguely that he had heard American young ladies expected every man they met to form a fresh link in their chain of adorers. He supposed Tarquin had been victimised

I was too conscious of trouble and vexation to agree or disagree. I cut the conversation short by a return to the kitchen. Even there, try as I might, I could not get away from perplexity. Had that scene with Kit hurt him too deeply for recovery? Certainly, she had not played the game fairly. And he had not spared her vanity. Her words to me were seared on my memory. A revelation of ugly passions that showed man and woman primitive as in past centuries, despite modern pretences.

But I had hoped, once he returned to his own home and his own mode of life, that he would recognise she had never been serious. Never meant him to have any place in her life that should imply sincerity. And, also, I had looked forward to some renewal of that frank confidence which had been a prelude to the visit to Colne. A discussion of that week . . . his criticisms marching with my own.

But he had never come near us. And now he had gone away altogether.

Through all this day I have thought of little else save Tarquin's abrupt departure; unexplained, as is our broken friendship. If he had even written! But I seemed to have dropped out of his memory. And it wasn't as if some other memory—worthier, had claimed him. That hurt me to the core of possible hurting. To be pushed aside by a mere sensual attraction. Beauty, fascination . . . mere careless cat-and-mouse play. It was horrible.

If he suffered, if it was something more than a man's hurt pride which had closed that interview and sent him wandering in search of consolation, there was nothing to do but wait. He would never know that I had overheard it. He could not realise that I pitied him with something of that motherliness which makes women see further than a man's mistakes. See the reason of them, and the foolishness that will one day bring its own recognition along with its own cure.

In so many things he may be cleverer, wiser than herself; but in *one* thing he is no wiser than the boy who once tired of play and harsh studies and crept back to kneel at her side; not wanting to talk—only to be comforted.

The days drift on. They bring troubles, and many anxieties. My chickens get ill; many of them die. The price of eggs falls with summer-time, and foreign importations. I find myself wondering whether I shall ever make a respectable livelihood?

Whether I shall not have to turn my attention to some new mode of industry.

Tony rarely comes. He is working hard, so he says, and trying for a place in his college boat for Eights' Week in intervals of hard study!

I smile to myself. That seems hardly credible! Yet he does not forget responsibilities of partnership, and large quantities of poultry food arrive from time to time, as well as journals of helpful hints.

The famous Week will soon be here. I knew that Kit was coming for it, or for three days of it. She was to stay at the Mitre with Tony's mother, and bring her American friend for a first visit to Oxford.

She wanted to compare the University with Harvard, of course! I imagine "comparisons" are the sole reason for American sight-seeing. Recognition of their own superiority compensates for that arduous task, and mitigates the discomforts of un-iced beverages and eggs in egg-cups!

I had heard nothing from Kit since I came home; neither had any news of Tarquin reached me.

Once only I bicycled over to the Manor Farm and saw his housekeeper. Everything was kept in order. The men worked industriously even without supervision. The wide fields were green and fresh with promise. The cattle carefully herded and tended by a herdsman Tarquin had appointed. Only the master spirit was absent, and I felt both house and farm lacked something.

I hear that the mysterious visitor has left. I have caught sight of him occasionally, but not spoken.

What his *real* purpose was in coming here and trying to interview the master of Manor Farm I cannot understand.

Rumours still buzz in taproom, or village store. I hear that from Ganders.

"Can't think whose bis'ness it be to rake up that story of the old gentleman," he says to me. "But I'm always hearin' o't. Marlott, out yonder, says there's more behind than we know of. I arsk you, Miss, what *could* be behind? 'Twas no one's fault, save that that dratted boy needn't ha' left him till he were rightfully home. How can there be aught that's mysterious in an axident which might ha' happened to anyone. But to listen to Marlott, in that 'ere bar come market nights, you'd think we hadn't by no means heerd the larst o't."

I said that probably it was because Clanditch was such an uneventful place it felt in duty bound to make the most of a chance like that inquest. He agreed it might be so, and then returned to the question of incubators. Why wouldn't I try one? There was a farm not a mile off where they'd now 500 chicks. All healthy and saleable. That was the way to work. In numbers. More you had the better for business. Quantity told, and good breeds, of course. They meant money, but money well spent. A few hundred pounds—

I cut him short. I hadn't money to lay out, or speculate with. We must go slowly. For the first year I only hoped to pay expenses, not even the outlay. Just enough to keep things going.

I did not tell him how carefully I regulated household matters. How strict a guard was kept on bills and necessaries. How I had learnt to wash and iron my own blouses, and Dad's collars, and economise in a hundred ways that once I had never dreamt of calling economy. With my purpose before me, and a dogged determination to achieve success, I could put aside many personal desires. I had learnt to waste no smallest atom of usable food. Cookery became an art of dressing up cold meat and seeming "scraps" under varying disguises. Of vegetables we had plenty; of fruit a promise from those full-blossomed trees that spoke of apples and plums and cherries. I had never made jam but I should learn. I *must* learn. I hadn't half enough to do. . . .

Now why did I break off here last night to lay my head down on the page I had been writing and cry like a silly child over those words?

IV

More Records.

THE routine of life has marked no special event. Hard work to banish thought, and strict attention to my obligations have passed the time with fatiguing monotony until a brisk reminder of "Eights'" comes from Tony.

The problems of 'varsity life are many and an outsider meddleth not therewith, or only at his peril.

When I had asked, " why 'Eights' ? " and what was meant by " Commem : " week ? I had been told I should soon know if I came to the town for those events. I applied to Dad and learnt that the one was representative of the river, and the other was connected with " The Schools " Exams. ; the " ancillary organisation of lectures, studies, scholarships and degrees."

This sounded very learned and unintelligible, as, indeed, does the whole College Encænia to an anxious enquirer.

Dad proceeded to inform me that life at a University was only popular in its acceptance of " means to an end." Most of the undergraduates of first term experience regarded that period as social torture, mitigated by the malignant ingenuity of Dons and tutors and proctors, and the " cosmic progress of the century." Whether that had anything to do with the abolition of headgear, astounding clothes, and a slouching walk with hands in pockets I did not enquire.

" Eights' Week " is a festal week ; a river week. A time for family meetings ; for teas on the College barges, moored in gaudy rows beside the Christchurch meadows. A time for rowing experts to prove their prowess. For strange races that were significant of " bumps." Defeat or triumph scored by such inglorious methods.

I felt curious to witness this spectacle. Tony had not gained his ambition and was not in the crew of the Merton boat. But practice and training demanded hard work, and I had seen nothing of him till the wondrous week approached. Then he wrote and begged me to stay a couple of days at the Mitre along with Kit and her party.

Dad agreed heartily. In fact, he spoke of coming down himself for sake of old times ; happily, or unhappily, so different from these modern days !

So I started to " put my house in order," and make arrangements for leaving my duties in other hands.

Kit sent me one of her characteristic scrawls.

The Mitre, Oxford.

" *Dear old pal,*

Are you coming to Eights' ? Eulie and I and a few kindred souls are here unchaperoned. (Supposed to have uncles and godfathers among the seedy old Dons.) You will be welcome even if you are *going to play Medusa to us ' nymphomaniacs,' which sounds more improper than it is ; my meaning being only*

dryads and nereids and such like! Anyway, come and join us, and pray for sunshine. It always rains, they tell me, and the winds of Isis are chill when one seeks to adorn oneself in the laces and muslins of fantasy.

Your river-mad Kit."

Later.

May had shown many changing moods. Warm; cold; rain. Then brilliant sunshine once again. I only went down for the two last days of the races. I found it a more enjoyable function than I had supposed.

The barges were gay with flags and awnings; the river crowded with punts and boating parties. Crowds of sightseers were on either bank, and the favoured guests of the "Varsity" barges indulged in lunches and teas, and were boisterously fêted by enthusiastic students and solemn-faced dignitaries.

I spent most of the time with Kit's party on the Merton barge watching the various races with astonished interest.

The standard of rowing had not regained pre-war excellence.

Merton, in which I was naturally most interested, stood third, New College had a record of many years and, for full twenty, had never been below the first three crews, who were rivals for headship of the river.

(I noted in my programme that for five years there was a gap in the records of river racing. From fateful 1914 until 1920 no "Eights' Week" had brought its crowds and gaiety to the sunny banks of Isis, or waited on cheers and acclamations of bumping triumphs.)

Kit and her crowd of admirers were the centre of attraction in our barge. I—being really interested in the proceedings—induced an enthusiastic undergrad to explain the mysteries of "Bumps" and championships. He responded eagerly.

There are thirty-seven Colleges in Oxford, and all of these are more or less significant of river prowess, or sports of some description. Cricket, tennis, athletics, rowing, swimming. A great record, but what had they to do with *study?* I asked my sunny-faced companion, as I had asked other people, but with much the same response. Possibly Oxford of a bygone generation may have furnished brilliant examples of the scholarly life; winners of double Firsts and Fellowships; smiled on by Vice-Chancellors; name-plated on College walls. "But," said my friend, "the War has changed all that. The bookish man

is bookish by nature, but he is a *rara avis* compared with the sports man. What did years of 'grinds' at Greek and Latin help when it came to the perils of warfare? Damn little, if any at all."

Muscle, physical strength, endurance and a dash of inventiveness, these were wanted. They *told* in the struggle. The blank of those dread years is filled by boys released from public schools earlier than they used to be. Oxford to-day is a Young Oxford; a free and easy Oxford. One wears the 'Varsity rag (*yclept* gown) for chapel or lectures. But not out of doors save in Commemoration Week, going or returning from Schools; and to face the vicissitudes of the Sheldonian.

Having learnt so much, I lured him to explain river tactics. Clubs, Societies, Rules of practice and training. We talked of punts, canoes, and outriggers. From them we got to College life in general. "Rags." Dissipation. The Union. Necessity of attending lectures. Doing some reading for sake of those who paid the piper all along the line. College life was expensive. The Rhodes scholars and the Americans certainly took it seriously and—economically, but their excellent example was not popular.

"Look at those men," said my friend. And I looked, and found them a goodly sight; little illustrative of the midnight oil and wet-towel tradition.

Their healthy, glowing youth impressed me no less than their cheery courtesy of manner, and unfailing good-humour. And they presented so much when one regarded them as representative of the New Manhood of the century. The replenishment of those fallen ranks whose names lined in monotonous columns the cloisters and entry halls their feet would never tread again.

My eyes wandered from barge to barge. Such goodly youth; such boisterous dawn of manhood. What could one do save bid them God-speed on the River of Life, and hope for them all good things lost to those five empty years whose records lay behind the bars of a Great Silence.

Two delightful days. I write of them with the regret of things past. Kit was less erratic; cnarming as ever; beautiful even amidst so much and such varied styles of beauty as crowded the town and graced the river.

We had little time for confidences, and Tarquin's name was not mentioned.

Dad did come down for the last day, and we went on the Balliol barge, and watched the crews to the tune of reminiscences of queer old fogies who had forgathered for sake of old times.

Times when there were no motor-buses in the "Corn" or the High. When one could tread the streets in peace, and cross Carfax without peril to life and limb. It amused me to hear them. I could not picture Oxford of to-day so different, or so peaceful.

My last evening was spent at a College dance, where my informative Merton student paid me much attention, and patiently adventured my "fox-trotting." He was such good company, so gay and bright, and oh! so deliciously *young* that I would have done even more than that at his request. This was his first year and he had already chummed up with Tony. Between the two I was well entertained. I gave myself up to the enjoyment of the moment. It was good to be young!

It seemed long since I had let myself go in such unconventional fashion. Perhaps I was none the worse. I hope not, even as I write of it with that little sort of *ache* which comes of looking back on what one has dared to enjoy.

> *"Prone at the marge with half-shut eyes I pore*
> *Above the wrinkled brightness of the stream,*
> *Till on a sudden breaks across my dream*
> *The pulsing music of the racing oar . . ."*

This fragment had been quoted to me by one of the Dons. He said it was from an Ode on Eights' Week, written by poor David Christie Murray.

It seems to fit in with my memories of the Isis; the boats and the flashing oars, and the gay crews competing for victory.

Two days after I came home I heard that Tarquin had returned.

Ganders was my informant. He added that he looked "queer," as if he'd been ill.

I was conscious of a little thrill of joy at the news of his return. I had missed him so much. Not the actual seeing him, but the consciousness that he was there to see, did occasion offer.

"Ill?" I echoed. "Do you mean really ill? Is it his wound again?"

Ganders didn't know what it was. One of the farm hands

had told him. He had not been out on the farm, or done anything. Just shut himself in, so the old housekeeper said.

I went about my own business, wondering when he would take it into his head to call and see us. Not for worlds would I appear anxious, or even let myself stray in the direction of the Manor Farm. The village was my boundary and hard work my antidote for restless desires.

The weather was warm and delightful. My garden looked full of promise. I imagined Tony's surprise when he next came to see us. That would not be till after Commemoration Week, he said. Then term ended, and the long vacation would leave Oxford desolate of all that buoyant youth whose contrast to the severe dignity of the University town was the more striking in that it was so gay and so undignified.

I refused to go down for the week. I said so much frivolity unfitted me for normal life. In reality, my hands were full. The chicken industry flourished, but brought fresh demands on time and care. Dad helped me with the garden; cutting and rolling the grass; tending flower-beds, and watering young plants. He was more and more contented with our life and our surroundings, and even shortage of money ceased to trouble him. Like myself, he began to "think ahead" and see our present industry multiplied a hundred-fold. "In two or three years" began to sound less speculative, as an assertion. It held more of certainty even unaided by poultry authorities, or the eulogistic advertisements of Karswood.

June 14th.

I welcomed June with that sense of delight in summer-time brought by my own birth-month. I was a year older. I looked at myself with some interest and speculation. Never in any sense "a beauty," hardly even pretty, I had troubled little about what that outward self might mean. I liked people for what they were. For what I found in them of interest; what I reached in sympathy. I expected to be liked for similar reasons. But I was not dependent on society. Oftentimes I had an intense longing for solitude. Just myself; my thoughts; my speculations on past and future. To live as Kit did, in a constant whirl of excitement, pleasure, unceasing chaff and chatter would have bored me inexpressibly. In like manner I suppose *my* sort of existence would have bored her. Neither of us could have exchanged places unless we could have changed our natures.

My relief in coming back to my modest home after any interlude of gaiety was that ability to content myself with myself. To dream a little, and think a little, and talk a little of my own pet interests. A longing to escape from the outside world made me regard solitude as sanctuary.

In writing of my days and what they held, or had presented as possible, I found a greater enjoyment than in their actual happenings.

This present summer is the first since the War that has promised me perfect freedom. I rise to sight and sense of Nature's beauty. Drink in scents of flowers and dew-drenched meadows. That joy of early morning, clear skies, and sunlight's gathering warmth is to me a joy that every morning brings and of which I never tire.

Then all those foolish feathered things who flock to my call and crowd around my delaying footsteps, how familiar they are now! How well I know them and their peculiarities. How well they seem to know me, and what I stand for in their lives. Often as I scold and abuse them I am quite conscious of our mutual dependence. They serve me and I must wait on them. To shirk any of my daily duties would seem disloyal. I have set myself a task and must carry it through.

Thus I hail my birthday.

. . . . . .

Dad had remembered the anniversary, and so had Kit. But I was not a little astonished when, late this afternoon, Tony dashed up in a car laden with flowers, a huge basket of strawberries, and a bundle of books and illustrated papers.

"Happy returns" was shouted as soon as he sprang from his "little Morris." He then proceeded to unload, and deliver his abundant gifts to the tune of my remonstrances.

"Really, Tony, you spoil me You are certainly the most generous of friends!"

"I know it," he said with his merry grin of acknowledgment. "I've made a reputation that way and I've got to keep it up. But this is purely selfish, partner. I want tea on the lawn. Loads of strawberries, and somewhere there's a pot of Nestle's cream, as good as the real thing and bears a journey. I was afraid of bringing *butter*—changed *en route*. The quickness of the car deceives the cow! *Is* cream a natural production, or do we manufacture it? No matter. This was warranted to stand record speed. . . . Now, let's set to

work. Out with table and chairs, and Polly puts the kettle on while I settle with Dad."

So he went on.

We had a most festive tea in a sheltered corner that gave a view of the new grounds and their brilliant fulfilment of the landscape planter's promise. True, the trellises for ramblers were as yet bare, but geraniums glowed in brilliance; irises stood in gaudy groups of purple and saffron; tall foxgloves added their share of colour, while modest verbena and heliotrope and lavender made up in fragrance what they lacked in bloom.

So we sat there and devoured strawberries and were greedily absorbed by Fuller's dainty confections, while Tony recounted adventures of Eights' Week, and the vicissitudes of the late trials for Honours, or even a "Pass." The lists were not yet out, but the Colleges were fast emptying. He himself was off in a few days for home and holiday.

"Switzerland, for choice," he added; "if the bally passport nuisance won't bother us too much. A bit of mountaineering induces study; eh, Sir?"

He turned to Dad, who observed that study was never induced by anything except the disposition of the student. On which Tony pretended to collapse, and murmured that something should really be done to "fizzle up the brain pan." Oxygen, or Iron Jelloids, or "Hydrochloric gas." He knew a fellow in the science schools, a great dab. Should he be consulted?

This very nearly resulted in a strawberry fight, so I put an end to the discussion by inviting my partner to come and survey his neglected property.

We strolled from end to end of the field, and studied the healthy young chicks running in and out of coops, clucked at by anxious mothers. Some were already in an advanced stage of feathers. The layers, however, were still backward and I had little to report of egg industry.

Still Tony pronounced matters as "entirely satisfactory," and surveyed our enlarged property with the eyes of a complacent owner.

Then, suddenly he asked what I wondered he had not asked before.

"And how fares our friend, Tarquinius? What's he about? 'Gathering nuts in May?' No. It's too late for that! . . . What's done in June? Oh, hay! Gathering crops of hay, I smell it in the air. Always makes me sneeze."

Which he proceeded to do, with considerable violence. Boris

came forward to investigate, and there was more boisterous nonsense, so that I omitted to answer the question.

But presently Tony suggested taking me round for a spin. I agreed, for it was a long time since I had had any motoring. Thus it came about that we dashed off down the familiar road which led past the Manor Farm, and my companion suggested we should call on the owner.

I hesitated. I said I had heard he was not well. Tony thought *that* an additional reason for being neighbourly.

In the end I gave in. We halted at the entrance gates and took the side path to the house.

V

Same Night.

WHAT subtle influence creeps around one's expectations at times; giving warning of changed conditions; waking fear where no fear was; sweeping like a chilling breath over a quiet moment?

I ask myself this to-night, sitting pensive and lonely before the task of writing in actual words what has meant a mere uneasy impression. It was and *is* concerned with the change in Tarquin. A curious sense of disquietude. Not only did he look ill but he seemed nervous and harassed, as if weighted by some hidden trouble.

Tony's idle chatter fell noisily across the quietude of the room, meeting little response. As for myself, the first look, the first handshake, had aroused that fear of which I am writing.

Something had happened.

That was what I felt.

No previous memory of him showed him as he was to-day. Giving mere formal welcome, and nervously questioning any change, any special reason for the visit. Had I heard of strangers in the village? Who had taken that vacant bungalow near the cross roads?

I could only speak of one stranger, happily departed. As for the bungalow, I knew nothing of its new tenants.

From that point we dropped into casual talk of the past gaieties of Eights' Week. Tony told him it was a shame to have

missed it. What could London, or even Henley, show to compare with Young Oxford at its boating best? With all that show of beauty and sportmanship which crowned the Isis with well-deserved triumphs?

But Tarquin made no response. He seemed indifferent to the recital of "bumps." Hero worship left him unmoved. He suffered Tony to talk unchecked, but I could see the subject held no interest.

My heart began to burn with indignation. "If this is Kit's doing——" I found myself saying. Then I changed the subject. I spoke of his farm. Its splendid air of promise; the fine hay crops; the fields of grain; his successful irrigation. He roused a little at that, but effort was plainly visible.

"You are not well," I said gently. "I—I heard—"

He muttered that his wound had been troubling again. His lameness was perceptible when he moved. Bicycling had been forbidden by the doctor. "Otherwise I would have been round to see you," he added. "I wanted a talk with your father."

I expressed regret. Tony offered him the services of "little Morris" for a week or two.

"I hired him till end of July," he said. "And you may as well have the advantage of the extra weeks. Can you drive?"

Tarquin said he had had plenty of practice in wartime. But the Morris was a new type. Tony offered to explain differences of mechanism, and the two went out to the car and became absorbed in technicalities. Finally they arranged to drive in to Oxford and Tarquin was to bring the car back. I said I would walk home, and be glad of the exercise. I watched them depart, glad of any sign of interest in that changed and saddened face.

Dad had questioned of the visit and of our neighbour, and I told him of the change and my uneasiness. It brought back memories of that past tragedy. Of the anonymous letters, the prying and questioning of an uncouth visitor.

"I wish I could feel we had seen the end of it all," said Dad. "But I'm sure we haven't. The rumours come and go, live and die, and are resurrected. I often think—"

He broke off abruptly. I was afraid to ask; afraid to pursue the subject. In my own mind was disquietude. I, too, had "often thought—"

June 15th.

To face a thing boldly and grapple with it must surely be better than to suspect it is lying in wait, ready for an unguarded

moment. All sorts of ideas found lodgment in my brain. We had not heard the last of that tragedy. The "Farm of Melchizedek" already stood out in a neighbourhood of unfriendliness as something with an ominous reputation.

Throwing my mind back to that time of disaster, I saw clearly the differences between father and son. Quarrels, mistrust, unfair dealing. Still, this proved nothing more remarkable than family disagreement. And few families were without them. But I could not help asking myself why rumours had spread and spread again, taking latterly a form so vindictive as those unsigned letters showed.

Tarquin had given no reason for his late absence. But the change I read in him was explanation of mental disquietude. He suffered; he was in trouble; and I felt powerless to help him as long as the cause was concealed.

"If only one were not hampered by conventions," I say to myself. "If only one could speak out, face to face, with no fear of being misunderstood!" But half the world seems gazing blankly at blank walls of division between what is *felt* and what is spoken.

Well, it is no use to go on scribbling like this, save the use of emptying out thoughts into visible substance of words!

I will put aside my papers and busy myself with household duties. Occupation is the best cure for a troubled mind.

June 21st.

Another week has come and gone. I have seen Tarquin driving the little car; driving it with a care and precision unknown to Tony, but he has not asked for my company, and I feel somewhat aggrieved by the omission.

Ill-natured remarks come to my ears. "That young upstart, setting up a car—what next? Well to be he, and money to burn, as they say! . . . Though where it comes from . . ."

Then head-shaking, and nods of meaning, and hints of "pride that has a fall!"

A suspicious, envious lot, I say to myself, sweeping village and holdings into one area of condemnation; tired of pursed lips, and hints that revolve always round one subject.

The Manor House and farm had once been accounted the place of importance in the district. I had never heard that the original owners had done anything very useful or remarkable. But they had been gentry, and lived there with a record of

generations. The old Marsyas and then the younger had taken over their rights ; altered, improved, and enlarged the property. This all made for hostility. So few farms in the district were productive ; agriculturally considered. And Tarquin's was a marvel of successful industry, especially in its fifth year. This present year of buzzing and unpleasant gossip.

" Where'd his money come from ? " " How was he able to buy machinery ; to acquire new land ; to utilise dairy produce ; to engage so much labour for haymaking, and shearing, and harvestship ? "

These were questions perpetually asked ; to be answered with the sharpness of spite and suspicion.

. . . . . .

This evening Tony came up to say good-bye.

He told me that " Torks " had made good use of the car and that the fresh air and exercise had " bucked him up no end." We went once more over our own property, and I explained profit and loss accounts, to which he was agreeably indifferent.

Finally it came to parting until the October term should reclaim its hordes of youth and learning. Tony had signally failed in his own endeavours, but there were still two years to make up for an ignominious beginning and, as he expressed it, " It's not as if I *wanted* a degree. What bally use to fix B.A. or M.A. to one's name unless one was going in for one of the professions ! "

So he countered Dad's strictures, and laughed at his rebukes, and finally got him on to his pet hobby—the Guide-Book. This effectually turned the subject, and we all parted in cordial agreement.

" Until the autumn—— " That sounded far off as Tony said it, and with the saying disappeared ; smiling and hand-waving and reckless of speed as I had so often seen him.

I went back to the kitchen, heavy-hearted. Boris followed me, his eyes wistful, as if he guessed at trouble. He stood sentinel while I scattered grain to the ever-greedy fowls, and trotted after me as I visited hen houses, collecting eggs. Not too many, considering my brave show of birds. But when the chicks grew up— ? I surveyed them with calculating eyes. The winter-laying hen is the profitable unit of a poultry farm. By next Christmas I expected to look upon my farm as a really paying concern. And Tony had promised an incubator then—" for experiment," as he put it.

The feeding finished, and the eggs safe in the cupboard,

which served for pantry and larder, I strolled out to the far end of the grounds. From there I could survey other farms, and calculate the miles of wire netting that represented an area of enclosures. Some were large, and almost over-stocked with birds to be sold for market, or breeding, or exchange. Very few enclosures were as neatly kept, or had been so picturesquely adapted as mine. That I owed to Ganders, and his interest and industry. It had been a surprising piece of good fortune to find such a helper. I had now a vegetable garden inestimably useful, besides a half acreage of flowers and shrubs that were a joy to behold.

I " want but little here below "—but not where flowers are concerned. I could do with fields and conservatories of them, but I prefer to see them out of doors; it seems their natural place. Thanks to Tony and the landscape gardener I had now a fine show, and my little home had an added charm for which I was heartily grateful. These summer months would own a new delight, atoning even for lack of companionship. Tony had gone, and Kit had " graciously excused herself " from accepting another invitation.

" Dear old Martha—hast thou forgotten Goodwood and Cowes? Revived social industries of the minor rich—— "

So she had written, and I meekly accepted so excellent an excuse for preferring race meetings and yachts to my humdrum existence and what it offered.

Perhaps some thought of her last visit and its consequences had touched her conscience. Perhaps she dreaded meeting Tarquin again. In her place I should have done so, and I had only given the invitation because of a haphazard, " I'll see you in the summer, then," which had signalised our last parting.

I strolled on and on in the lovely evening coolness, taking field paths and short cuts with knowledge of a district now familiar. Boris followed me, with occasional lapses of good behaviour incidental on a rabbit, or another canine intruder.

Finally, I reached a stile and perched myself upon the top rail. My view now was of barns and hay ricks, and wide green fields of oats and barley. Thence a stretch of woods to the dip of the valley, and a vision of church towers old and grey as their own histories.

Suddenly in the distance I caught sight of a car. It was evading the main road and coming along a narrow lane bordered by high hedges. The outlet was within eyesight of my own perch, but I thought to myself in alarm, "if it *meets* anything!"

There could be no possibility of passing, so narrow was the way. Only someone unfamiliar with the neighbourhood would have adventured there.

I saw Boris prick up his ears. Then he gave his loud bark of welcome. My heart stopped a beat, then galloped on to the faint "toot" of warning; the sound of swift approach.

Very soon the car was at the top of the lane. I laughed softly. "He'll have to go back the way he came!" I jumped off my perch and went forward. Tarquin was the driver.

He stopped the car and stared at me and the hedge and the stile. Then gave greeting. "I'm afraid I've come to 'no thoroughfare!'" he said.

"You have indeed. I was wondering who was so ignorant of the locality as to try that lane."

"I—I wasn't thinking of where I was going. I just drove on until I heard the dog's bark, and then——"

He bent over the wheel to pat the eager head as Boris upreared himself in boisterous welcome.

"Tony has lent me the car for another week," he went on. "It's a great boon. I can get about; besides the trouble it saves, and the time."

"Well, in this instance you haven't saved either," I said. "You'll have to work backwards till you come to the entrance of the lane; and pray you won't meet anything; a cow or a sheep for choice! I'm sorry for you if you do."

"I wonder if you'd mind—"

"Not at all," I interposed, knowing quite well what he hesitated to say—"standing on the step and keeping a look out? Of course, I will."

"No, no. Come in and sit here. Only please do give the warning in time."

So I jumped into the car and ordered Boris to lead the way as we forced a backward progress. I stood up and kept watch, but happily nothing showed itself until we neared the entrance of the lane. Then came a shrill hoot and I saw another car, containing three men, flashing along the main road from which Tarquin had turned. It sped on, and thus allowed us to come out. We had no choice but to follow and for some time kept

it in sight. A low rakish car, moving swiftly. The two men passengers kept looking back at us.

It was unusual to see strangers about these roads at this time of the evening. (It must have been nearly eight o'clock.) I wondered who they were and what was their business. As we neared the turn-off for the farm the car slowed down as if waiting our approach. One of the men stood up and hailed us. "This right for Clanditch?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "straight on, then turn to the right at the cross roads."

He touched his cap, then looked over to where the Manor House showed in all its importance as landmark.

"What s the name of that place?" he asked, pointing.

I glanced at Tarquin. He answered. The man repeated the name.

"Manor Farm. . . . Ah—I was wondering; thought 'twas other side o' Clanditch."

He said something to his companion. He also turned and looked at the fine old house in its bravery of creeper and ivy, and lichened tiles.

"Owner is called Marsyas, isn't he?" went on the first questioner. "Fine old place. Happen to know if he's there, present time?"

"Yes," said Tarquin. "Or rather, he would be there if he wasn't *here*."

Both men stared; then one gave a short laugh.

"You're the gentleman? That's queer. I mean, meeting you like this. We heard you were abroad—"

"Outside information isn't always reliable," said Tarquin.

"That's so. Um—a fine old place, and well kept. Does you credit, sir. Not one of the old family though, are you?"

"I don't see why I'm to stop here satisfying your curiosity. I should be obliged if you'd move on and let me turn my car."

"Oh! Sorry, I'm sure. Didn't mean to hurt your feelings!"

He sat down, and the car moved on. Then it stopped again; Tarquin took no notice, merely turned "little Morris" and sped swiftly back, evidently forgetting that I was a passenger and would have to get home somehow.

Near the side entrance he paused. Our eyes met.

"Yes; I'm here," I said meekly. "I suppose you forgot?"

He gave a short abrupt laugh. "What a boor you must think me! I—I did forget. But no matter. I'll drive you home. Please forgive me."

(*Forgive him* . . . and a drive of two miles still? . . .)

He spoke at last. "I've been wondering who those men were, and what they want here," he said. "Did you think there was anything strange about them? Anything official?"

I stared at him.

"No—just ordinary. The commercial traveller sort."

"But *two*?" he said. "That class don't go about in pairs, as a rule. I'm beginning to fear . . . but why should I trouble you? There may be nothing in it, only——"

He put his hand to his head in a vague, distressed way.

"I'm worried; dreadfully worried. I think I'll come in and have a talk with your father. He's always so kind."

"Do!" I exclaimed eagerly.

9 *p.m.*

The two are sitting out on the verandah—talking, talking, I don't know what about. I could see they didn't want me, so I came away and made lemonade, and set it with some cakes and glasses on the table in the sitting-room.

When I hear them go in I will join the party. I am not curious; only anxious. Possibly there is not much difference between the two. Circumstances explain cause and effect.

10 *p.m.*

They came in. The lemonade was appreciated with a dash of whisky advised by father.

I thought they both looked very grave and somewhat anxious. Evidently the conversation had merely relieved the tension of the hidden "wrong" without offering a remedy. Tarquin soon took leave of us, but promised to come again soon. He again made apology to me for interrupting my walk. I only laughed. The interruption had not been unwelcome.

"Will you tell me what it's all about?" I asked Dad, as I moved to and fro, putting aside the cakes and glasses.

He was standing by the mantelpiece, lighting his pipe.

"That's a bit difficult, my dear. Our friend has been bothered by that lawyer. He says that the anonymous letters must be traced, or their meaning explained. Tarquin's own legal man suggests 'no notice and the thing will die out of itself.' But—will it?"

I felt my breath catch in a quick rejoinder. "The *thing* . . . but what thing? What is it?"

"The question of his father's death. These busybodies are again raising the issue—accident, or purpose? There's some personal spite in it all. I've always thought so, and I'm not sure if a fresh investigation won't arise."

"But how?"

"Simply by an application to the Home Secretary to open the grave."

"Dad!" I gasped the exclamation, and then sat down, shocked and helpless.

"*Open the grave!* . . . That old man . . . but why? What good would that do?"

"It would show whether any violence had been used. You know there was a contusion . . . the coroner thought it the result of the fall . . . only—"

"Oh! go *on*," I entreated, as he paused.

"Well, my dear, the body was lying on its face; the injury was to the *back of the head.*"

"But surely, surely——"

My voice broke. It seemed too horrible to pronounce suspicion. Suspicion which these rumours voiced so cruelly. The hints and innuendoes magnified at last into accusation.

For if there was any question of violence, everyone would ask to whose interest was it that the old man should die? One person alone could benefit by the death, and that person had benefited so enormously that the simmering jealousy of the district had roused itself to outward development.

That farm, so enlarged and improved and productive. Those groups of cattle and browsing sheep; those overflowing orchards, what did they mean but outlay of money? Whose? . . . And again, with nods and winks, "Ay, *whose?*"

Dad went on talking. Showing the queer tricks and turns that the matter had taken until now Tarquin had been threatened by that final indignity—exhumation. A renewed inquiry. The whole case re-opened.

"And whatever happens," added my father, "the cloud of suspicion is slow to lift. Besides, innocence enforced by law is never quite the same as innocence unquestioned. There's always a hint of scandal behind. A man is hard put to it to live *that* down in a place where he is known, and from which his accusers have sprung."

I asked no more questions. Heavy-hearted, I went away and to bed.

11 *p.m.*

The quiet night, the wide fields sleeping under the starlight, all the beauty and peace of this longed-for summer is broken for me.

Tarquin accused of anything so dreadful! Tarquin, ill at ease, with something in his face I had never seen before. Tarquin alone in that empty house, with its memories, its closed doors, its shadowy silences . . . waiting—for what?

VI

After an Interval—August 1st.

How long since I wrote those words? How many weeks of dull listless days, disturbed thoughts, anxious hours, have swept my poor little records into a forced neglect?

I couldn't write what I *feared*. I hate to write of what is happening. I am consumed with anxiety. I face an upheaval of all previous standards and conditions of life.

When the War had ended I told myself "nothing will ever be the same again." Now something else has ended the calm of ordered days; of regular habits. Mechanically I have gone about the house and fulfilled duties and accomplished tasks, yet the spirit has gone out of them all. I ask myself why I should feel so much? What business of mine is it that "the Farm of Melchizedek" should have become a place of ill repute? Why should Tarquin Marsyas usurp a place in my mind and my thoughts that no other man has ever held? For I think of him, picture him, long for sight and sound of him and—strangest of all, *believe* in him to the exclusion of all proofs.

I cannot answer. I only know these things have happened. I am filled with unrest. Uneasiness, like a threatening cloud, hovers over each day's slow progress. Rumours everywhere. Scandal rife at the gossip-shop of the village; on the lips of the neighbours as they bring their laden baskets to the depôt, or pass me in the street.

"Have you heard?" . . . *"Do you know?"* . . . So it goes on, and strangers appear, and Marlott struts about in official importance, and at last the rumours devolve into certainty.

But within the certainty lurks a strange secrecy. No one knows when the exhumation will take place but—*there will be an exhumation.* The post office says so ; the policeman says so. I wonder if the person most concerned knows anything about it ?

He does not come near us, but I hear the work of the farm goes on uninterruptedly.

The weather has been uncertain. Cold and rain alternating with heat. The world of society has scattered to grouse moors and seaside. The papers are full of the Irish rebellion. Disquiet in the air and in my soul as the days come and go.

To-night I took out my discarded journal and read back the history of its past year with a sense of wonder.

Such queer things have happened. The little fragments of the puzzle show so plainly a *meaning* of what I might construct. And yet I shrink from the task.

I find myself saying: "I never thought—oh? I never thought anything like this would happen ! "

Why should it have happened, and to me of all people ? Why —because I selected this farm and made acquaintance with a Greek Patriarch, should tragedy have swept over my life and my little domicile ! . . . Impossible to answer.

August 4th.

Dad greeted me this morning with a pleased smile, after glancing at correspondence.

"My dear—this is very gratifying. I wrote to Hammond and Co., explaining my idea of the Guide-Book, and giving a slight synopsis of contents. They seem struck by the novelty and—well, originality, of the subject. They are prepared to publish on agreed terms when the MS. is submitted. That may mean money. A book like this often proves a little income. It *goes on* selling steadily year after year. A rolling stone, maybe, but gathering substantial moss."

He rubbed his hands. I had rarely seen him so pleased. Also I was a little surprised to hear that the much-derided Guide-Book had evolved into anything saleable. We had treated it as a jest so long that the sober earnest of print and publication meant a complete *volte face.*

I offered congratulations, and for once the breakfast-table had a new subject for discussion.

There was still another month's work, if not more, before the little volume would be completed, and Dad was eager to get on with it now that there seemed a chance of publication.

I cleared away the breakfast things and went off to my own duties.

For the last week some of the young birds have been ailing and many have died. Ganders has had to physic them, and that has meant coming at night. He catches them on their perches and their poor beaks are treated with a solution of Izal Fluid. It hurts me to see their sufferings, and hear their half-choked breathing.

Suffering. Sorrow. Physical and mental ills on every side. I am conscious of an ever-increasing depression, hard to combat.

I would have given anything to hear Tony's cheery voice, his unfailing jests and absurd suggestions. But he was far away; holiday making. He had not sent me a line for weeks.

Same Night.

I want to write down something here while it is fresh in my mind. While it fits into the puzzle-piece whose fragments this mystery cements.

I knew Ganders came round in the evenings to minister to the sick chickens. Sometimes not till ten o'clock. Occasionally I went out to the houses and held the light, or gave needful assistance. To-night had chanced to be one of those disagreeable evenings with scudding showers of rain and a touch of autumn in the chill sweep of the wind, that of late had visited these regions. I had remained within; indeed, I had been scribbling busily when there came a knock at the back door. I opened it and found my handyman standing there. He was steadying his bicycle, and asked me for a match to light the rear lamp which had gone out.

I handed him a box. "Are you going home; have you seen to the fowls?" I asked.

"Not to-night, Miss. They're better; besides——"

He broke off to light a match and I saw his face, strangely eager and excited. The match went out owing to the wind. I suggested his coming into the scullery. This he did, and lit his lamp without further trouble. Then he said—

"I dunno' as I ought to tell ye, but I've heerd it's to-night they be goin' to dig up that grave, Miss; an' I wants to go and see 'em doin' it."

I started. Then it *was* to be done. The rumours verified.

"You are going to the churchyard?" I faltered.

"Yes, Miss. It's been kep' very secret, but I *know* it's to-night. There's six or seven perlice from Lunnon, and Marlott,

he be goin', too. I knows a place one could see—onobserved, as they say—if I put my light out. I 'spose, Miss, you wouldn't care to come along o' me? Not that it's a sight for young ladies, especially if they'm narvous-like. Only you was allays so interested—— "

Interested? . . .

Why—my life seemed bound up in that mystery of the Manor Farm! From first to last of my stay here it had been the centre of my interest. It had almost made me a fatalist. That strange old man, his cajolery and trickery. That stern young judge, his son, and our growing friendship . . . and then the hovering shadows that threatened peace and stood as self-disclosures. . . . All these, and the culminating tragedy to-night. What did they forebode? What did they threaten?

I stood there; cold as ice; dreading I know not what, while the red light of the bicycle gleamed like a malevolent eye. It lured me on to answer its owner's suggestion.

Exhumation? That mysterious re-opening of Death's mysteries. That legal desecration of what Earth and Church have committed to eternal silence.

" I'm feared I startled ye, Miss; ye're gone so white! "

I roused myself by a strong effort. " It seems so . . . so horrible! But all the same—— "

I hesitated. His eyes followed mine to where my rainproof coat hung on a nail; the oilskin cap beside it.

" Yes, miss; if ye'd put those on no one 'ud know you from a lad, beggin' yer pardon. And I knows a place where us could see and not *be* seen. Only if maybe ye're frightened—"

Frightened? I drew myself up. I was perfectly cool and collected.

" I'll just tell father I'm with you," I said. " He goes to bed about this time; and he'll think we're seeing to the birds."

" Right y'are, Miss. I wouldn't like the old gentleman to get oneasy. No hurry. It wont' be afore eleven-thirty, so I heer'd."

* * * * *

I think all my life I shall remember that scene to-night, and while it is fresh *as* a memory I write it down. Not for any purpose it may serve, only for sake of its own strangeness and its horror.

The rain swept down in brief chilling showers. The night was more like one in November than August. We sped along

the muddy road, deserted at this hour ; our own lights illumin ating the lampless route. We were nearing the Churchyar when I heard another cycle behind us. The bell sounded, flashed by. Suddenly I called out. The rider was Tarquin At sound of my voice he stopped and got off the machine.

"*You*—and here ? "

That was all. But his voice held anger as well as surpris With the impulse of the moment I burst into explanation.

" Oh—*please*, don't think it's only curiosity. I know it mus look horrid . . . but I couldn't believe . . . and whe Ganders said it was really to be done . . . to-night . . .

" You came to see the sport ? "

" Oh, don't ! " I entreated. I was trembling so that clutched his arm to steady myself. " I'm sure you know, yo ought to know, that my interest is something far different."

" Forgive me—— " his voice grew strangely gentle. " Bu you must allow that this sort of thing is a trial for the best nerves and tempers. The insolence—the uncalled-for inte ference—and I'm so helpless. I wasn't even informed."

" But what on earth do they want to do it for ? " I aske " What do they expect to discover ? "

" Goodness knows ! Wounds . . . poison . . . an thing ! The road of suspicion is a queer and crooked one. may lead me to a prison, or—God help me—a further ste than that ! "

I shuddered. " Oh no ! No ! it's impossible. They can suspect."

" They do, and this is the result. But come along, sin you *are* here. . . . We'll conceal ourselves behind one the tombstones and watch the ghouls at work. I believe they ahead of us. It isn't far now. We'd better walk."

So we walked, led by Ganders, who said he knew a field pat We took it. Tarquin drew my hand within his own. (I thin I would have willingly walked a red-hot ploughshare such fashion !) Very slowly and cautiously we moved, comi at last to a small iron gate at the rear of the Churchyard. was unlatched, and we passed through. Our way w indicated now by a circle of light from a row of hurrica lanterns.

We stopped, though our footsteps made no sound on t thick, unscythed grass. I saw figures grouped around that ar of light. Men—six or seven, I should say. The rain had ceas as abruptly as it had begun. Through a scattered bank

clouds came a faint streak of moonlight. I could distinguish the square tower of the Church; a group of yews; the old leaning tombstones.

Tarquin held my arm as if he feared I should move nearer, but there was no necessity. From where we stood we were screened by heavy bushes, and rows of tombstones. The group of figures faced the other way. We could see only their backs, and watch their movements.

They had not yet commenced the work; they seemed in eager discussion above the plain stone cross Tarquin had placed as memorial.

I heard Ganders muttering something. "They four is th' London 'fishals . . . and there be old Marlott keepin' guard at the entry."

Tarquin said nothing, nor did I; but I glanced at his face and saw it set in stern, suppressed anger.

Then came a sudden movement. The group separated. Two men, coatless and hatless, began to dig. I heard Tarquin's heavy breathing, a muttered oath, then, swift as thought he strode forward, and I saw him face the group, who turned astonished faces at his sudden appearance. An angry challenge rang out.

"What are you doing here? On whose authority dare you disturb this grave?"

An official-looking individual answered him.

"Who—are you? And what business is it of yours?"

"I am the son of the man who lies there——"

The official moved a step forward. "His *son!* Well, even if you are, we are acting in the name of the law."

He produced a document from his coat-pocket. I saw him show it to Tarquin.

"The Home Office has ordered this grave to be opened. . . . From information received."

"Information!" Tarquin's voice cut across the banal plea. "What information? The gossip of spies, of scandal-mongers! Why was I not informed? I am his son; his only living relative. If there was any need for this proceeding surely I was the person to authorise it?"

There was a brief silence. I could see heads turn one to another. Evidently no one liked to explain the real reason for an apparent outrage.

The sky had cleared; yellow gleams of the lanterns filled the surrounding space with light. I could see the whole group

distinctly. Tarquin's tall figure, the sergeant of police, the me with their spades and pickaxes. I heard Ganders' stifle remonstrance.

"He didn't oughter interfere. 'Tis gov'ment offishal duty They only does it 'cos they'm ordered so to do."

Voices rose and fell. Argument went on. I could see the were not going to permit interruption. "As the son of th deceased man you should be the last person to interfere wit our duty. There is grave suspicion of the inquest, of the wit nesses, of the *real* cause of death. Unless the Home Offic had been assured of necessity, matters would not have gon so far."

Tarquin was ordered to stand aside, but he remained near th head of the grave. The gruesome proceedings went on I cannot say how long a time passed. I had subsided on t a low moss-covered tombstone, and there I sat and watche and waited while the heavy clods were flung out and heape on either side; while three feet of earth were removed fro a plain oak coffin, and it was raised and laid beside th opening.

I heard directions given. I heard Tarquin's voice, and th answer. "Bampton mortuary," it sounded like, and "a resumed inquest by a government official." Then the grave diggers and two other men bore the coffin to the gate, an Tarquin came back to where I sat in a sort of dumb stupor.

"You are still here?"

I rose stiffly; my limbs ached and I was chilled with the col and damp, of which I had been unconscious.

"Let us go home," he went on. "There's nothing more t see, or do."

I tried to speak, but I could find no words. In the distanc I heard the hum of a motor. I supposed they had brought a motor-van or lorry for the removal, but that was no concer of mine. We went through the iron gate again, and took ou respective cycles and so rode off in the soft grey dawn tha had banished the eerie shadows of that awful night. Not a word could I speak. What was there to say in any way ex pressive of the fear my heart held? Of the new terrors that law could arouse and authority enforce?

At the cross-roads we parted. There was light enough now and I wondered as I looked at the pallor of his face, and the queer, uneasy smile of Ganders' lips, what sort of figure I myself presented? We all dismounted. Tarquin held out his hand.

"A gruesome business, isn't it? And I'm afraid you'll be troubled again. I mean, if there's a new inquest; the whole affair re-opened."

"Will *that*—have to happen?" I faltered.

"They wouldn't have gone so far without good reason," he answered. "Perhaps, in a way, it is for the best. I shall know now who my secret enemy is, and what I have to face."

"I could tell 'ee, if ye'll listen. Let th' whole thing come out again, and you get hold o' that young varmint as was here at the time. He can't 'scape cross-examinin' now by sayin' he's too sick to appear. You take my hint, sir. He knows more o' that death o' your father than anyone else in th' place."

"Pat?" I exclaimed.

"That loony!" muttered Tarquin, contemptuously.

"They sort o' chaps as pretends they be half-witted are a powerful danger; that they be. No morals, and no sense, and queer sorts o' likes and dislikes. I an't one to interfere wi' things as I don't understand, but this matter an't goin' to end wi'out trouble. Question is, *who* was cause first and foremost o' th' whole bisness?"

A sort of glow came over me. A sense of relief. I felt grateful to my invaluable handyman for this rift in the clouds. An unspoken suspicion of my own trailed its way back through that opening. I had placed a record of that time in the pages of my journal. Perhaps . . . some day . . . they might be of use?

I heard Tarquin speaking. He held out his hand. His eyes met mine. Truly the heart has a logic of its own; giving and demanding faith against all appearances of facts.

When he said, "Are we to be friends—still?" I answered with the swift impulse of such feminine logic. It summarises for me whole incidents past and to come. They needed neither explanation nor assurance. When I answered, "Friends—*always*," I think he must have known that I spoke from the depths of my heart, in the sort of faith that would like to remove mountains if a Biblical promise were capable of proof.

I could not sleep. I felt I did not want to go to bed. So I took off my damp clothes and made some tea, and then sat down and wrote the account of all those strange doings of the night. I wanted them to face me—later, as proofs of what had happened—and above all, I wanted to convince myself that nothing could shake my faith in Tarquin Marsyas.

VII

A Month Later.

AND now at last the " dogs of war " are let loose, and the local journalist and the London dailies alike revel in the " Mystery of the Manor Farm ! "

Once again that story of the old man's visit and strange disappearance has signalised columns of print. The details of the first inquest ; the new cause of suspicion ; that exhumation and its result. For the Coroner's place was usurped by a Home Office specialist, and it was agreed that " cause of death was a blow apparently from some blunt instrument, fracturing the base of the skull, and causing unconsciousness." As the body had been found lying on its face the wound could not have been the result of a fall.

The whole case was re-opened, and this time there was no verdict of " accidental death." Pat Malone and his mother were summoned from Ireland and the delights of Sinn-Feinism to repeat their evidence.

The Crown was prosecuting, egged on by the affirmation of Mr. Gideon Jassey, and the carefully-gathered evidence of those official investigators whom I have before mentioned.

The magistrates decided to send it for trial on a verdict of " Murder—by some person or persons unknown." Then on leaving the court, Tarquin Marsyas was detained " in custody " with the significant rider of " bail not allowed."

I read it in a fury of indignation. So swiftly and strangely had things happened that I could scarcely believe in the actuality of the drama facing me in cold significance of print.

I saw that name I loved buffeted by harsh suggestions painted with black suspicion. I read melodramatic announcements ; evidence twisted and turned into queer channels of condemnation. Heard again and again that question, " To whose interest was it that death should overtake this man at that particular time ? "

Ay—*whose ?* . . .

All evidence, as all facts pointed to one name, and rumour voiced it with ever-increasing certainty.

Father and son had always been bad friends. Their quarrels were notorious, and in the letter put before the Court as evidence it was plain that the old man had threatened to evict his son from the Manor Farm unless certain conditions were observed. The reply to this letter was missing. The prosecution put in

a suggestion that to obtain that answer the old man had come down to interview his son in person. He had gone to the Farm on that cold, stormy evening; had been conducted and left there in safety, according to the witness, Pat Malone. Then came a further damning statement of the said witness—*not previously given.* Wormed out of reluctant lips by skilful questioning thus it read:—

Extracts from Local Press.

Query. You say you left the deceased gentleman at the main entrance of the Manor Farm. That he would have to walk from there to the usual one. Why did you not take him to that "usual one"—if it was usual?

Answer. 'Twas further to go round; and I know'd he could find it for himself.

Query. Were there lights in the house?

Answer. There was, sir.

Query. In what rooms?

Answer. The kitchen and front room.

Query. Then you saw lights although you were at the wrong entrance?

Answer. I'd be walkin' a few steps after him to see the way he would go.

Query. But you didn't walk so far as that other gate?

Answer. I might ha' done. I don't call to mind how far 'twas.

Query. Did you hear or see anyone during that time?

(A long pause. The witness shuffled uneasily and glanced round as if searching for some suggestion.)

The question was repeated.

Answer. I—I might be hearin' somethin.' I wasn't takin' much notice, as the snow was fallin'.

Query. What sort of "something"? Come, speak up. There's nothing to fear. What do you think you heard?

Answer. Steps—near by; rustlin' among the bushes beyant.

Query. Why did you not state this in your previous evidence?

Answer. Sure, I was ill and moithered, and I couldn't think clear.

Query. But you can "think clear" now that you're in your usual health?

Answer. Me mother says——

Query. No, no; that's not evidence. We don't want to

hear what your mother said. Only what you saw, or heard You spoke of steps. What sort of steps? . . . A animal's, or a person's?

Answer. I'd say 'twas someone walkin' down the path, o maybe 'twas up.

(*Objections raised to this doubtful assertion.*)

Query. You must keep to the point! You heard steps Was it too dark to see if anyone was in the path?

Answer. I see'd a shadow-like—

Query. You never said that before?

Answer. I wasn't axed as you're for axin, and I said I wa moithered like.

Query. I suppose the equivalent of *moithered* is worried o puzzled, isn't it?

Answer. It may be. I'm not knowin' all the ways th people be spakin' in this country.

Query. But you know you're on your *oath.* You're speakin of what you saw on that night. Remember you were the las person who did see the old gentleman alive.

Answer. I can't be sure that I was.

Query. Why?

Answer. Bekase if someone was walkin' there he'd have me the ould villain.

Query (*horrified*). Be careful how you express yoursel

Answer. He was the hard man, and cruel.

Query. Were you ever employed by him?

Answer. I was.

Query. And you found him a hard master?

Answer. I did.

Query. That is all. You can stand down.

All? But I see a new danger. I note the skill that ha drawn out these facts and will presently weave them int condemnation.

If anyone had been near that path, then he must have see or heard the old man making his way to the house. Was Pa Malone to be believed? Why had he never mentioned anythin of such vital importance before?

A growing sense of indignation sprang up within me as I rea all this.

My own evidence and Dad's had been mere recapitulation o what we had previously given. But this—this new, unexpected statement had quite overthrown that verdict of "accident."

It seemed almost as if it had been prompted. As if the way had been carefully paved so that the inconsistencies with what had been previously taken down might be accounted for. The boy had been ill, was in a high fever ; his statement under such conditions was less reliable than his present evidence in the witness-box.

Oh ! it was all so clever, so dangerous. A trap skilfully laid as only legal traps can be . . . and the victim stood just within its sharp entanglement, helpless and ensnared.

The situation had become hazardous. Father and I talked it over with fear in our hearts despite efforts at hopefulness.

Truly might Tarquin Marsyas say, " An enemy hath done this thing." It was the work of enmity beyond all doubt, though whether it could be proved remained to be seen.

We both wrote to Tarquin assuring him of an entire belief in his innocence. Dad begged him to secure the best counsel, and strengthen his case at all points. I added, " Whatever happens, I shall believe in you. I shall count myself as always—your friend."

We sent the letters to where he was " detained,"—that word of ominous meaning. I wondered if he would be allowed to receive them, or only after they had been examined by the authorities.

How truly hateful the whole thing was !

* * * * *

Letters from Tony and from Kit. They had seen the news in the English papers. One wrote from Switzerland, and the other from a Scottish grouse moor. Tony's letter was a series of indignant outbursts. A violent denunciation of law and lawyers, and the professional instinct of man-trappers.

" So ridiculous ! So impossible ! " he burst forth. *" Kill his own father, and for no reason but a quarrel about money . . . and taking the word of that Irish idiot ! Why he was always contradicting himself. . . . One thing said at the first inquest—quite a different thing at the second ! . . . I'm boiling with indignation. Our noble Superbus ! Why, I'd as soon believe it of myself ! "*

(I loved the boy for that generous outburst.)

Kit was equally indignant—

" Of course, one had heard rumours. I told you when I stayed with you—but what a result ! Who on earth could have

suggested a crime and insisted on that exhumation? I feel awfully sorry for him. Of course, he can prove his innocence. He must. But what a terrible scandal, and you in your peaceful home dragged into it and the light of day. Newspaper day!

My poor, dear Sherry, nothing happens in this horrid world but the thing we least expect to happen. I'd like to write to poor old Torks, but I'm afraid he'd return it—unopened. I behaved abominably, I know. But then, if he is wise, he'll know where to find consolation. Verbum sap.

Your much bouleverseyed

KIT.

* * * * *

The first hint of autumn.

A tinge of brown and gold in the leaves. A succession of chill showers and lowering skies.

Bad weather for my invalids, who sit bedraggled and moping, and I suppose miss their "Scratcheries," which have turned into muddy pools. Yet the foolish birds prefer them to their clean warm houses!

In these days I am thankful for work. The more the better. Activities of hand and limb keep thought at bay, and thought is becoming a ceaseless torment.

Tarquin had asked me to give an eye now and then to his farm. He had appointed his head man to carry on the work. He was elderly, but vigorous, and had proved trustworthy. All the harvest business must rest in his hands. Tarquin had sold off his dairy stock (to get money for the trial) with the exception of two or three milkers for home use. But the nice dairies and the clean brisk girls had disappeared, and to my mind even the glowing fields of corn were a less pleasing sight than those tiled shelves, the bright pans, the bowls of cream and stacks of butter I had seen before this change.

Glad of the excuse, I used to cycle over to have a chat with the old housekeeper. She was deeply concerned for her master. She believed, as I did, that he was perfectly innocent. If the old man had died through violence, then it must be proved who struck the blow, but, for her part, she maintained that his son had not left the house on that fatal night. Up to ten o'clock he had been in the kitchen. She had brought in the supper for two, as ordered, and seen the upstairs room prepared for the expected guest.

"When th' morning come and the master said as how his father had never turned up, I thought he might ha' changed

his mind. The weather was terrible bad, as you know, Miss. We none o' us stirred out o' th' house that day. Master seemed a little uneasy, but we both came to conclusion the old gentleman had stayed in London, or Oxford maybe. For my part, I thought no more on't till the alarm was raised owing to finding the body."

I have cut out the reports of Pat Malone's evidence, and compared them with my own former memorandums. I also went over those entrance paths carefully. (They had been measured and investigated by the police.)

I came to the conclusion that the boy was lying.

He may have left the old man at the wrong entrance, as he always declared, but I felt sure he had not waited to see him try for the other, or heard "steps," or seen "shadows." All this additional evidence had been carefully suggested.

I don't know where the Malones were staying. They never came to Clanditch. The legal authorities who had secured them both were evidently providing their lodgings. The case was to come on at the quarter sessions, and we could only wait with what patience we possessed until the date of trial was announced.

Dad seemed a little perplexed by my visible unrest. He himself was cheerful and hopeful.

"The law is a queer thing," he said to-day; "but the law very, very rarely condemns an innocent man. Tarquin will pull through. I'm sure of it. Of course, it's very hard on him and his friends. Such a perfectly unaccountable charge. But then—why did he make an enemy of a lawyer?"

"You think that Gideon Jassey is at the bottom of it?"

"Undoubtedly. Even if he fails to justify the proceedings he will have the satisfaction of landing our friend into a great deal of expense; crippling his means,and curtailing his ambitions No doubt that will please him mightily."

I pondered over the matter, wondering if there was any way in which I could help. Hating—yet longing for the day when once more the "Farm of Melchizedek" should play its part in the life-drama of its owner. I watched its own life pass as a prosperous season. Full crops; rich harvest; ripe pasturage. And above them all stood that old grey house, brooding in sombre melancholy over other histories and other sorrows; awaiting the lifting of this new shadow and its grim menace.

Was there something fateful about that house? Was it bent

on adding another tragedy to its list of misfortunes? Had Tarquin's ambition only succeeded in overwhelming him with disgrace as well as unpopularity?

I asked myself these questions in solitary hours when I, too, sat brooding over past events. When I wrote, or tore up, or re-read those recording pages which at last might have a use.

For I had made up my mind to send that portion of my diary containing the accounts of that fateful December night to Tarquin's legal adviser. I knew his name; the address was easily found. I knew, too, that he was preparing the case for some great legal luminary who was to be counsel for the accused man. I could supply actual facts and details, such as no other witness could give. Written; and dated; and authentic.

I am acting on my own impulse. I have said nothing to Dad, but when the papers had gone—(I made a copy first)—I felt a sudden sense of relief.

That night I clasped my hands and prayed as I had never prayed for light in this present darkness.

All the tormenting facts and imaginings of past months were marshalled in my mind. Challenged as proof or dismissed as irrelevant. Some ugly facts loomed amidst that array. That letter of which I had never spoken—nor of which there had been any trace. A dangerous letter as matters stood now; showing that the quarrel had not been patched up; that the visit of the old man was its result. I had not included it in those extracts.

Oh! it is hard to write; hard to wed cold facts to living words. Hard even to marshal the commonplace happenings of the passing days so that they represent their passage. But having set myself a task I am determined to perform it thoroughly. Some day I may want to read all this that I have written. To trace for my own pleasure the gradual awakening of my own heart.

Love and lovers had been of slight interest in my earlier youth. I had never thought of myself as owning either looks or character to charm any man. I had never thought I could learn to care for one particular individual as apart from and more important than his fellows. And in moments of humility I say to myself, "I could never have cared for *him*, but for those hints of self-revelation."

The recognition of hardships bravely borne; this culminating tragedy which filled my heart with pity and foreboding. I could not get away from it, and that meant I could not get away from

him. Nor did I want to—now. It mattered little whether he thought of me; whether that word "friend" carried any hidden tenderness to shrine its meaning when he was taken away. I knew that I could bear even that if it made him think of me; if he understood that I was working for his freedom and utterly refusing to believe in his guilt. I was determined to work on, and tirelessly, to prove his innocence.

I preached patience to my soul. I said the lawyer must have two or more days to consider those papers. I wondered whether he would think them important? Whether he would mind my drawing his attention to the blood-stains on the lantern; the wound on Pat Malone's hand; the discrepancies between his first and second statements. These facts seemed to me worthy of special note, as did the confessed animosity between the boy and his former employer. It was not that I wanted to incriminate Pat, but I wanted to defend Tarquin. To show that his story was more to be credited than that of his accuser.

The defence would chiefly rest on the evidence of the old housekeeper, who swore he had not left the house, and on his own affirmation given at the previous enquiry. There had been no proof of his father's arrival; no signal for admission; no sound of footsteps, though the snow had not begun to fall until Pat had left him. The old man knew his way perfectly. Darkness would not have hindered him. Besides, there were lights in the house. Left there till midnight.

Carefully I constructed the case in my own fashion. I don't know if it was a weak one according to law. It satisfied myself. It interested Dad as I read it bit by bit. Read it, without remembering what it betrayed of myself. Accusation came suddenly in a stern denunciation.

"Sherry, I believe you have been guilty of that early Victorian weakness—*keeping a diary!*"

I felt my face flush guiltily.

"Why not? You must remember those long lonely evenings? You—always busy over your own work."

"True," he said; "most true. Only it wasn't always work."

Then we both laughed.

"I suppose," he said presently, "one mustn't ask to see those records?"

There was a humorous twinkle in his eye. I have no doubt he had Pepys, and Queen Victoria, and other notable memorisers in his mind. But I was not to be caught.

"Certainly not. I wrote them for my own private convenience. There are interests as well as technicalities about poultry farming."

"No doubt," he said; "and about other farming—and farmers."

I ignored the innuendo. I was my cool, self-possessed self once more. "I found it an occupation. A change from pots and pans and chicken food."

"Yes," he said musingly. "I can imagine reasons. . . . Besides, I always knew you had brains."

"Do you think their possession is necessary for the jotting down of the hundred and one petty details that go to make life?"

"Some life—not all. For instance, here, in this short space of time, we find ourselves confronted by tragedy. A crime perhaps. By one of those stage dramas which seem so impossible on the stage, so horribly real—off."

There was excitement in his voice. He sat up and surveyed me with an entirely new interest.

"Upon my word, Sherry, I shouldn't wonder if you came out as the *dea ex machina* of this business. Your poultry farm, your helpers—(those Malones, you know)—your diary. If you have been correct as to *dates*, that would be invaluable!"

I nodded.

"There were dates," I said, "only when anything of interest happened."

Again that little humorous twitch of the mouth.

"Then one can argue from that *who* and what interested you in the drab monotony of those winter days?"

"One can argue what one chooses," I said. "Since the diary is not an exhibit—yet."

"Take care it isn't called for. You are an important witness. If it were known that you had had this habit of daily entering what came under your notice—"

(I felt conscious, and yet strangely hopeful). His pause was emphatic as his words.

"Yes?" I questioned.

"Well, you can judge for yourself of its importance. A passing memory fades; a written record *remains*."

Then I made a bold plunge and told him what I had done. How I had taken out the original extracts and sent them to Tarquin's lawyer in London.

"I may hear—any day," I said nervously. "If they were no use I begged him to return them."

"You kept a copy, I hope?"

"Yes. I thought of that."

"Ah!—brains." He sat back in his chair and rubbed his hands. "Said I not so? The Guide-Book will have a worthy sponsor when its baptism is announced! If you can enlist legal sympathy as readily as you have mine, the battle is won!"

"I'm afraid the two cases are not identical," I told him. "You see, you are prejudiced in my favour. The lawyers hold a quite impersonal position."

"So they do. But, prejudice apart, this unexpected help may alter all things. Our friend should be very grateful to you, if he only knew."

I rose hastily and pretended preparation for supper by clearing the table.

Suddenly Dad rose also. "Come here, my dear," he said.

I glanced up in surprise. A little embarrassed by the unwonted softness of his voice.

I approached. He put his hands on my shoulders and solemnly pressed a kiss on my brow.

"There!—We're not an emotional pair, nor much given to professions of feeling, but somehow to-night I am conscious that we understand each other better than we have ever done? . . . Am I right? . . . Oh—for heaven's sake, child, don't *cry!* That would give the hint of bathos I strive to avoid."

I did not cry. I just pressed his hand and went away to the kitchen and told Boris he was the best dog in the world!

VIII

A Week Later.

TOWARDS the end of the week Tarquin's lawyer wrote to me. He said he was coming down to see us. My diary was a *most important asset* in the case he was getting together. He hoped I had still the lantern—and that dog!

I was astonished. Boris? What had Boris to do with this business? Then I remembered how I had described

his strange uneasiness that night . . . the way he had gone to the door and howled. . . . As for the lantern—that still hung on its nail, but I recalled now Mrs. Malone's anxiety to clean the stains next day. The memory of that time—Pat's wound, his sullen terror, his illness—how glad I was that I had recorded them. Then the veiled animosity of that other man—Tarquin's enemy; that too held place and portion of the story.

Oh! let no one say that keeping a diary is a school-girlish, sentimental thing if the fact of doing so suddenly presents itself as the means of saving a man's life!

That ugly word which disfigures one of my entries stands forth again in a recorded verdict. The flimsy safeguard of "person or persons unknown" had been beaten down by the virulent animosity of a schemer. Wider and wider spread the circles of that pool into which had dropped the first pebble of suspicion. Mercilessly and cautiously the antagonist had gone to work, until now nothing stands between him and the mischief wrought save the actual condemnation which he has supported.

I showed Mr. Lorrimer's letter to Dad, and we appointed an early day for his visit. I prepared a cold luncheon, easy to bring in, as excuse of no service. I was in a fever of expectation. I could see that Dad shared it despite efforts to appear his tranquil impassive self.

It was a warm misty day, herald of September, and of closing summer. I had my journal close at hand should proof be necessary of a genuine extract, shown by numbered pages, as well as dates.

I was more nervous than I could have believed possible. I—who had faced trials of war-days, and air-raids, and done manual labour on the land so that strong male youth should be free for its country's sake!

The sound of an arriving motor turned me cold and sick with dread. I could hardly make my way to the door. Dad caught sight of my face.

"Why, Shirley, my dear, buck up, for God's sake! There's nothing to fear, believe me."

But I *did* fear. I could not keep my hand steady, or subdue my heart's beats.

Our visitor was a brisk kindly man of some forty or more years. His greeting was of the cheeriest description. One could not associate him with anything so unpleasant as crime

or criminal courts. He and Dad met almost as old friends. The business on which he had called was postponed, by mutual agreement, until after luncheon. That passed off with due appreciation of cold chicken, and tongue in aspic, and Russian salad. The sweets were simply stewed fruit and custard in cups.

"Country fare," as Dad said without apology, and as such eminently suited to our simple tastes.

After I had cleared the table they lit pipes, not cigarettes, and drew their chairs up and proceedings commenced.

(I am writing of them the same night.)

"There is a humorous side to this matter," began Mr. Lorrimer; "as well as a serious one. To start with, the incidents are so trivial that one wonders *how* they could have been magnified into importance. For the humour I have to thank this young lady." (He bowed to me.) "For the importance—I am beholden to an odd mixture of jealousy and animosity. The curious point of the case is that the person working for such an end as revenge, has worked in a very unskilful manner. Still, that exhumation has proved that the death of old Marsyas was not entirely due to the cold and exposure incidental to his fall. There *had* been a blow sufficiently strong to render him insensible. That heavy snowfall did the rest. He *may* have recovered consciousness, but no doubt such consciousness would only have been of the dazed sleepy kind which intense cold engenders. Now—if you please, we'll proceed to our business of the defence."

He laid some papers on the table. I saw they were typed and paged.

"I shall require you to bring me that lantern you speak of," he said to me. "And, if you will be so good, your entire journal. . . . Oh—don't be alarmed! It's only to compare the pages withdrawn—from their original positions."

I rose and secured the lantern and my diary (almost a *book* of records now!) and brought them to him. He asked me to turn back to the dates I had given in December—and to read out any further details connected with the occurrence, not already submitted.

This I did; going back a few pages—then pausing at that entry, "I do not like that boy. . . . *often have I had to chastise him.*"

Mr. Lorrimer interposed, "You're sure the old gentleman said that?"

" I wrote it immediately after his departure, and I have a goo memory," I answered.

" That is evident from the manner in which you hav particularised, or generalised what passed from day to day Mr. Marsyas said he would accept the offer of the boy's escort as he would not be able to discover the short cut to this Mano Farm ? "

" That is what I wrote."

" Did he seem reluctant to go—when the boy came roun with the lantern ? "

I looked at Dad. He answered for me. " Not then. H had made up his mind, and he knew his son was expecting him.

" The diary says that he would have a long walk ; more tha a mile ? " went on the lawyer.

" Yes—by the short cut. Two or even more by the road.

" And after this boy had said, ' a shilling wasn't much fo his trouble,' the old man answered, ' Better than a thrashing as I gave you last time we met ' ? "

I glanced at my copy of the entries. " Yes—he said that."

" And the old gentleman had a stout stick in his hand You say you noticed it ? "

" I did ; also that he seemed more feeble than on the las occasion I had seen him."

" We will take page . . . 136 . . . next. Yo speak of the restlessness of the dog—' *lifting his head ; whimper of uneasiness.*' Was he attached to the old man ? "

" No, but to his son. He used often to go back to the Farn with him ; it was his first home."

" I see. You then returned to your little kitchen and bega to write. Have you any idea how long you were writin before the dog rose and gave that ' strange melancholy howl of which you speak ? "

I shook my head. " I had washed up the tea things an tidied the kitchen first. But I noticed the time after going t the door with the dog."

" Yes—and the weather. The snow was falling then, an you would not put the dog outside. (He read), ' *I looked at th clock ; it was ten minutes past nine. . . .*' You add tha you suddenly remembered Boris had given that melancholy howl *when the clock struck ?* "

" Yes."

He looked at Dad. " You see how valuable this infor mation is ? We get the time ; we can make deductions.'

Again he turned to me. "You state that Pat Malone returned shortly afterwards. The snow was then falling. He had the lantern in his hand, and it was still alight? You're quite sure of that?"

"*Quite*. I should not have written it, otherwise."

He took me carefully over extract after extract. What Pat had said; the giving of the promised shilling; the blood-stains on his hand and his explanation.

"You did not examine the lantern *then?* You just hung it up on its usual nail in the scullery?"

"Yes."

"The next day the boy did not come round. You had to attend to the poultry yourself?"

"Yes, at first. The man who occasionally helped me came later."

"There is a gap after that entry. . . . Is it in any way—essential?"

"No," I said, with a sudden guilty flush. (The omission related to that fragment of a letter which had got mixed up with Dad's papers.)

"I won't ask to look at it, of course. A young lady's diary must necessarily contain private matters pertaining to herself; not intended for outsiders. . . . So we get next a visit from Mrs. Malone. Graphically described. She mentions that her son is ill. Also she discovers that the lantern he used on that eventful night has stains or smears on the glass. You say, '*It's just as Pat gave it to me.*' The woman goes on to suggest that the stains might be caused by his hand bleeding. He had explained that by saying he had fallen on some sharp stones. This was not what he had told you. He first said he had knocked his hand against the fence. You *particularise* this statement by noting that the boy had told two different stories. Then you add his mother's description of him as being "strange in the head ever since *that* night." She also rambles on about old Mr. Marsyas, and his cruelty to the boy. He had worked him hard, half starved, and more than once had thrashed him. This is very material. It proves existing animosity between the two and it gives a basis for my plan of defence. If the old man had stumbled and lain on the ground comparatively helpless the boy might have suddenly yielded to an impulse of revenge. Have struck him as he lay there. I fancy, with this very lantern. . . . See how the rim is bent. Of course, it's too late now to distinguish blood-

stains, but we have Mrs. Malone's knowledge of them, as wel as Miss Gayle's, and also the woman's anxiety to clean thi lantern."

He took it up and turned it round. (I had had the broken glas replaced, but the rim, as he had said, was damaged and bent)

From this point he went on, and with ever-deepening interes I listened. The calm even tones, the skilful manner in which he marshalled facts, the trivial details that became importan by reason of their place in the whole, these set before me the workings of a legal mind. I had always been convinced o Tarquin's innocence; had felt certain it would be proved But now that I saw the means of proof and heard of my own part in it, the whole matter assumed a different aspect.

There was no doubt of the discrepancy between Pat Malone's first statement and second. My diary proved that. It did indeed seem, as Mr. Lorrimer had said, that I was to be the most important witness in the case.

I cannot record in full all that was said and done in this interview. It lasted long; it ended in a visit to the Manor Farm and a talk with the old housekeeper.

Then, step by step, we traced that distance between the two entrances. Grew more and more convinced that the boy must have led the old man to that dark uneven path; seen him stumble and fall; then struck him viciously on the head and left him unconscious. The snowfall did the rest. That—and the bitter cold and his own age and helplessness.

With regard to hearing no noise or sound of steps, we proved that possibility by shutting ourselves in the kitchen (where Tarquin had been sitting most of that evening) and sending the old woman and one of the maids out to stamp and make as much noise as they could. Nothing was audible within; so thick were the walls; so close-fitting the casements.

"Besides," said Mr. Lorrimer, "there would have been very little noise, if any. The body was found just within the second entrance, a little to the side where the tall holly bushes grew. It seems as if he had turned the wrong way, or else mistaken the path. In any case, I am quite satisfied that our friend Tarquin had nothing to do with it. To bring it home to that young Irish vagabond remains for the Crown. I can only repeat once again, Miss Gayle, that my client and I are greatly indebted to you, and when he stands—free, and honourable, and cleared of this disgraceful charge, I know to whom his gratitude will be due!"

I write it. I am proud to write it, though I only see the words through a mist of tears. It has been a trying time; a trying day as climax; but to-night I feel as if the clouds had lifted. The sun would shine once more, and the owner of the Manor Farm stand once again free and in honour before his fellow men!

That pitiful scheme of revenge must fail and overwhelm the schemer with his own crude machinations. I could await the trial with calmness and perfect faith in its results.

September 29th.

Slowly the weeks drag.

It will soon be a year since I came here and started my enterprise. I look back with no small surprise on its eventfulness. To think that this quiet, unimportant corner of the county should have suddenly become a centre of public interest.

To think that the mere fact of my starting a diary as a means of occupation for lonely hours should have placed me in the forefront of such interest! Strange indeed.

No need to keep it a secret from Dad any longer. He congratulated me on the idea, and assumed that a habit so useful would be continued. But there is a great deal written here which I could permit no other eyes to see. Fragments that I read with some wonder at their candid self-revelation. It is as if the *thinking* part of myself would allow of no disguise. In speech and in the common trend of events we cannot permit such personal candour. It might break many a friendship, or create a breach in family union hard to mend by explanations.

I had not the slightest intention of giving my full confidence (as in these pages) to any of the persons mentioned. Were the records ever to form a story in the casual meaning of the word I should disguise them under fictitious names and places.

Often in these soft misty evenings I have wandered out to gaze over all that distant region of fields and pasturage awaiting their owner's return. The tufts of firs; the autumn tints of oak and beech; the shorn acres bereft of splendid crops; lights and shadows and muffled sounds, and the sweet strange scents of the land. How I have grown to love them all. I cannot picture life as lived in busy towns, and close rooms. In the cheap "suburb" that might have been our fate but for my poultry-farming enterprise. How well it has gone. What

hopes it holds, and how kind and welcome the help I hav
received.

From the stile on which I rest I can see the grey outlines o
the Manor Farm; the faint curl of rising smoke from it
chimneys; the warm gold of the harvest moon upon its roo
Beautiful. Peaceful. Calm. Waiting once again as throug
those dead centuries for its owner's return; for the stir o
human activities in its desolate rooms.

I think of him so often. How can I help it? How can
cease to associate him with the place and the life that hav
meant the alphabet of our friendship?

Sometimes when I begin to " maunder " as above I ruthlessl
destroy the pages, and replace them by calm prosaic record
of the day. But it is a relief to let myself go at times. I hav
no one to speak to in these long evenings. Tony, Kit, Tarquin
the garrulous Mrs. Malone, are all gone, and Dad is fully en
grossed with the concluding portions of his book. Save a
meals we don't talk much, though I know that our minds ar
occupied with the same thought. The coming trial and its
result.

Next month it will come on, and next month the tide o
Oxford life turns backward and brings with it the crowd o
students, dons, masters, professors, that mean the 'Varsity
Tony will be at Merton once again. All that humming
boisterous life will stir the town's activities to their particula
meanings.

And next month, too, I am to possess an incubator! T
start poultry-producing on new and improved methods.

Bathos! . . . to set that fact against the importance o
the Oxford Michaelmas Term, or the lurid meanings of Assize
Courts. But the news has come in one of Tony's breezy letters,
and is to—what he calls—cement the old partnership!

The faithful Ganders is highly pleased at the news. Our
feathered flock are once more healthy and dutiful, and the egg-
laying is on a scale of munificence that argues well for profits.

So, in this odd contrast of duties and anxieties I pass my time,
and only to these safe pages do I confide what I really feel.

IX

The Last Entries.

THE case was to be tried before a Judge comparatively new to criminal trials. An eminent K.C., who had been appointed to a vacant judgeship. Mr. Lorrimer told me this, and added that the legal dignitary was strongly averse to capital punishment. We were fortunate in that our special fate lay in such lenient hands. "Not," added the genial lawyer, "but that the case stands on its own merits. Our K.C. sees to that. He is as convinced as myself that Tarquin Marsyas is innocent."

"The Malones are still here, I suppose?"

He said he had heard so. He was sorry for his leader when it came to examining them in the witness box!

He gave me my own instructions. I need not fear that anything in my diary would be read in court save what was relevant to the subject in hand. "I have talked it over with our counsel," he added, "and he is of my opinion that you have proved the prosecution's chief witness an utter liar! . . . Then, of course, the whole thing falls to pieces, as far as my client is concerned. What happens to Patrick Malone is his affair. Being a witless sort of fool, he may get off, but he'll never stand Mr. Shapstone's cross-examination, with your records to back it up."

Afterwards.

How to write of it all with any sort of calmness! How to paint with my unskilful words the tragic meaning of those Court scenes!

Tony was there; yes—and Kit. She came to me where I waited with the other witnesses; outwardly composed; inwardly a bundle of nerves and tremors.

Tony's cheery voice, his hand pressure, his certainty of the "winning card" were reassuring, but were only part of the "comings and goings" of many terrible hours.

The prosecution had the first innings.

The case was presented with formal care and plausible accuracy. What had induced the Crown to take it up was, of course, its own business. The public Prosecutor had acted "from information received;" from sworn evidence, and legal statements as set forth by Mr. Gideon Jassey, attorney at law.

I was not called the first day. The reasons for the exhuma-

tion ; the condition of the body, and the discovery of the scalp-wound—(passed as accidental at the first inquest)—made up the proceedings. A few witnesses gave brief evidence of the finding of the body in the snow and its position. Then came the turn of Gideon Jassey. He proved long existing ill-feeling between father and son ; the drawing up of that unsigned will and the appointment at the Manor Farm, which the old man had set out to keep. Dad was called on to certify the visit to us and the subsequent departure.

A very brief examination. Then Pat Malone was called.

He was in that sour dogged mood which always made him impracticable. He had been skilfully manipulated, but his evidence was so manifest a contradiction that he was at last told to stand down.

Later our K.C. rose to cross-examine him. I read in the next day's paper that there was a perceptible stir in court. That " the proceedings created some laughter," but the boy doggedly persisted in the essential point of his statement. He *had* taken " th' ould gintleman to the wrong entrance." He *had* told him to find his own way to the other. He *had* seen lights and heard steps, and then come away. Suddenly he began to blubber and shake. The prosecuting counsel explained that the boy was subject to " fits." So he was dismissed till the following morning, and the case concluded for the first day.

Dad and I were staying at an hotel for the three days of the trial. Mr. Lorrimer had said " three," at least. Once the issue was put to sword-point of proof the whole case of the prosecution would fall like a pack of cards.

Kit was staying at the same hotel. A little more sane, a little more like the Kit of old times. She and Tony and Dad tried their best to cheer me. My trial was to be the cross-examination by counsel for the Crown. A severe and terrible person of whom I had caught a glimpse before the case opened.

I went to bed in sheer panic, saying to myself—" To-morrow . . . Oh—to-morrow ! "

The day was dreary in the extreme. Rain fell heavily ; the streets were muddy and dismal.

A crowd was waiting to get into the court house when we arrived and, escorted by Mr. Lorrimer, passed safely in. Dad had a seat in court. I was again kept waiting in the witness's room. The constant chatter and remarks were odious interruptions to my strained thoughts. Mrs. Malone was encouraging

Pat, and explaining his "strange wakeness" to sympathising friends. Me, she avoided for reasons best known to herself. Possibly she remembered how much I knew, and could tell, of the events of that fatal night.

At last the summons came.

"Miss Shirley Gayle" . . . and again at the door, a voice . . . "Shirley Gayle—this way, please."

"This way" was to follow my conductor to the witness-box. To find myself standing and facing a crowded court room. A sea of faces; a figure robed in scarlet; white-bewigged barristers. A table on which stood "exhibits." The famous lantern; a thick walking stick; papers, documents, and *my Diary!*

For a moment the whole scene swam in a confused mist. Then I heard a voice, and saw a hand offering me the "book" to swear upon. I muttered the prescribed formula; collected my senses; and stood up, facing Judge and Jury.

It appeared I was the first witness for the defence. The prosecution had had its innings.

The first few questions were banal and unimportant, but gradually the examination drew forth particulars of that visit of the old man.

Query. Who had suggested sending the boy, Pat Malone, as escort?

Answer. I did. The night was dark and cloudy. I thought Mr. Marsyas would not be able to find his way.

Query. Can you tell the jury the date and time of this visit, and consequent departure of the deceased?

(I did so).

Query. Your memory is a very good one, or this event made a special impression?

Answer. It might have made no impression save for the fact that ever since I took up the poultry farm at Clanditch I have kept a diary. In it I entered events, however trivial or seemingly unimportant.

(The Judge looked up).

Query. Is that diary here?

Answer. Yes.

Query. You have no objection to my reading out the extract relating to this visit and its—consequences?

Answer. None whatever.

(Diary handed up.)

The counsel proceeded to read. The jury showed unusual attention. The Judge made notes.

Up jumped the counsel for the prosecution. "M'lud, I object to this . . . It is not evidence."

Our Counsel. "May I ask your lordship?—"

(Objection over-ruled. The extracts are given, and I am asked to affirm them on oath. I do so.)

The trial proceeded. I came off with flying colours. My evidence threw a different light on the matter, and the prosecution looked glum.

Then the ordeal of cross-examination began.

But I was not to be shaken. Questions, even innuendoes that brought the blood to my cheeks, left the main points of my evidence undisturbed.

Query. Was I not a *special* friend of the accused?

Answer. We were friends, in the ordinary acceptance of the word. He had helped me with my business, as I was quite a novice . . . That was all.

(*Hateful suggestions!*)

Query. Hadn't the accused promised me the adjoining land *after the death of his father?*

Answer. No. There had been no such promise ever made to me!

Query. But you acquired that extra bit of property when Tarquin Marsyas succeeded to the estate of the deceased?

Answer. Not for some time afterwards.

Query. I am not questioning the time. The tenant was evicted, and the land made over to you. *Did you pay for it?*

Answer. My father arranged the matter with Mr. Tarquin.

Query. Was money paid down?

Answer. A friend lent us half the money . . .

(*Interruption again.* "This, m'lud, is irrelevant. I object.")

Judge. We are testing this young lady's memory. If reliable upon one point, it should be reliable upon all.

Myself. The whole transaction is entered in my diary. I rely on that.

Then, after more questions, the opposing K.C. sat down. The next witness was called. Tarquin's housekeeper. She was cool and self-possessed. She repeated that her master had not left the house at all that night of December 9th. He told her he was expecting his father. She had prepared the old gentleman's usual room, and got supper. Most of the time Mr. Tarquin had been in the kitchen. She would have

known had he gone out, for the back entrance was through the kitchen.

The cross-examination tried vainly to shake her evidence. I could see the prosecution was weakening visibly.

Pat Malone was recalled to answer on which side of the house he had seen the lights. " He wasn't sure if 'twas the front, or the back . . . only there *were* lights."

He then manifested symptoms of another " fit."

The jury showed signs of weariness and restlessness. There were no more witnesses. The defence next called Tarquin Marsyas. He stepped into the witness box from the dock; cool, calm and self-possessed. His account of disagreements with his father was perfectly candid; in no way excuse for himself. Asked if the old man had not threatened to turn him out of the Manor Farm, he said he had; more than once.

Query. Will you tell the jury the events of that night of December 9th, and also the subsequent date, when the body was found?

He did so. Facts, points, and dates all as I had written them; all as Mr. Lorrimer had taken them down, and placed them before him *as instruction for evidence* if his counsel should put him in the box. No cross-examination could shake him. No suggestion throw him into such anger as had overwhelmed me. He created a favourable impression at once. (I was sitting now at the back of the court, and could see and hear what occurred).

For a full hour they kept him on the rack, sparing nothing that might prove as accusation of guilt. The animus of that wily adversary was plainly shown. The death of a useful client, the withdrawal of the whole business by the son as soon as he was free to act for himself, were dwelt upon by our side when it came to addressing the jury. Both counsel had their innings, and took every advantage of it. The defence had the first word of appeal to those " good men and true," who held the issue in their hands. It was brilliant, conclusive, brief. It rested entirely upon the innocence of the accused man; the failure of the Crown to prove he had had any hand in this tragic occurrence. The chief witness (stated *our* K.C.) had proved quite unreliable. The testimony of that young lady whose admirable diary had been of such conspicuous assistance in the case, had thrown an entirely different light upon the matter. Whether the deceased had met his death through accident, or violence, it was perfectly certain that he had *not* met it at the hands of the accused. The jury had heard the evidence of this

Irish boy; they had also heard the evidence of Miss Gayle, of the housekeeper, and the declaration on oath of the accused man. In the face of such evidence they were bound to give a verdict of "not guilty," to set free an honoured and respected citizen unjustly accused, and maliciously traduced!

(*Faint applause, instantly rebuked*).

The prosecution had its turn.

The judge then summed up. His address was calm, dispassionate, well balanced, but it was clear to my mind that his sympathies were with Tarquin Marsyas. He had detected that low standard of legal vindictiveness which had first prompted the accusation. Possibly he had secret information of the manner in which Mr. Gideon Jassey had worked. (A mass of irrelevant detail had been dismissed as untrustworthy.) The lawyer had plainly shown enmity and its cause. A bad beginning for a case. He had tried to humiliate his adversary in every possible way, and yet even to his narrow prejudices it must have been evident that the humiliation recoiled on himself. That the accused man was capable of proving his innocence, clearly and reasonably, and with the fearlessness that innocence bestows. Point after point was taken up, emphasised, or dismissed. The prosecution had proved that the deceased had met his death by an act of violence, but it had signally failed in proving by whom such act had been committed. It had rested with them to show the guilt of the accused man. The jury must decide whether they had done so to the satisfaction of law and justice. He dismissed them to their task, and the formulation of a verdict which should confirm guilt, or sustain innocence.

The jury retired. The judge went to his private room. The crowded court stirred, rustled, commented in frenzied whispers. Dad and I sat together. Tarquin had been removed by his warders.

Slowly the agonising moments passed. Time, as measured by suspense, meant more than "figures on a dial."

I hope that never again will life bring me such moments, or try to prove that there are not sixty minutes in ten!

For in ten minutes the jury returned. A brief time to deliberate on the value of a life!

The judge took his seat. Tarquin came back. Pale, composed as ever. A hush swept over the previous restlessness. There was no thought but of listening.

Quietly the words fell. "Are you agreed upon your verdict?"
"We are."
"Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"
"*Not Guilty*, my lord."

Oh God! the relief . . .

I remember Dad mopping my eyes with his handkerchief. He said afterwards that the tears were raining down my cheeks, but I was quite unconscious of the fact. I only heard confused murmurs, rustlings, an effort to cheer the verdict as the clerk of the court gave dismissal.

All the sympathy had been with Tarquin. He was standing there, white as death; his hands grasping the rails before him. The warders stood aside, on their faces broad smiles of congratulation. Then he stepped down from the place of humiliation to that of triumph. Free.

Sundry formalities had to be gone through. We waited. Dad and Tony, and I and Mr. Lorrimer. Then he came to us and we stood hand-clasped. Silent.

What could mere words express of the feelings in our hearts. Even Tony was only capable of a choking mutter. "Of course, old man . . . said you were a winner all the time!"

And then some official came from the court room and brought —my diary. He gave it to Mr. Lorrimer. He handed it to me.

"The extracts are with my papers," he said. "But you shall have them to replace in that valuable little volume."

I felt all eyes on me. I flushed guiltily, though God knows there was nothing to be ashamed of save my own foolish confessions. I took the book, and as I did so Tarquin came up to me.

"I can't thank you," he said, very low, so that only I could hear him. "But the life you have saved must do so . . . in the future it owes to you."

And, as in foolish tearfulness I write it all down, I bless God in my heart for sending me here. For giving me courage to take up the burden of life and for putting into my head the idea of memorising its trivialities.

But never again will my occupations seem trivial seeing that once they formed my life's greatest triumph.

In the light the darkness is forgotten. In this new haze of

tranquillity I lose sight of terrors of past months. I hug Boris I tell him the whole story and I am convinced he understands He is a hero, I say to him. He has achieved great things. He wags a depreciating tail.

"You are too flattering, my mistress. But—I think you'll agree with me he was worth fighting for."

Agree with him? . . . Oh, Boris, you *angel!*

October 20th.

I am very near the end of this surprising journal of mine, for the year will soon be up.

The first year of my poultry farm. The first twelve strange, unequal months I set out to record as subjects of my venture.

Am I glad or sorry that I came here? That the rains fell, and the winds blew, and Mrs. Waddles proved a non-layer, and Uncle Timothy has given up the ghost; that a small horde of new-fledged chicks have died, and eggs been scarce, and the profit-and-loss account stands on an uneven balance? A trifle on the profit side, but nothing, as Tony says, to make a fuss about.

But next year we try the Incubator, and next year I have the garnered experience of this to help me, and the comfort of a sure friendship behind it all.

In my heart is a sense of quiet joy. Content that has come to me with hope.

No need to speak more plainly.

Afar off lie those hard-won fields. Bare and shorn of harvest spoils, but spreading wide as once spread a man s ambition towards the unconquered land.

He comes again as of old to talk of hopes, and intentions. To breathe the free air of fulfilment, to point with pardonable pride to results of hard work, and unsparing exertion. To whisper of a—future.

"A practical man," says Dad; "and a born farmer. Of such stuff are England's best sons. She were wise to make herself land-loved, and self productive, for in that lies her future salvation!"

And I listen with quiet agreement, knowing how well I, too, love this place of pastures and meadows; fruitful harvest fields and tranquil homes.

All that means the land and the service of the land. Exacting,

compelling, but with full hands of reward for all the toil demanded.

And amidst it all, the distant bleat of sheep, the lowing cows, the chuckling poultry, the tributes of the soil, and the soft pungency of autumn scents, I close this record of my year's experience.

What a second year may bring lies wrapped in the soft mystery of hope. One of the best lessons the Land teaches is—Patience.

THE END.

KQ-022-006